



## THE WAY THE WIND BLOWS

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STENDHAL: AN INTRODUCTION  
TO THE NOVELIST

# THE WAY THE WIND BLOWS

*A Memoir of a Journey across  
South America*

BY  
HOWARD CLEWES

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PART ONE

ELEVEN LIEUTENANTS



## I

THE air stirred and an eddy of dust scurried across the naked field. Beyond the runway the burned land flowed into the haze, broken here and there by a sprawl of scrub, or low trees, or wild green corn. The commandant wound the crank of the telephone, fetched a sigh and savagely wound the crank again. The sun beat down on the wide empty earth.

‘No?’

‘No,’ the commandant said. He was a plump dark-skinned Brazilian and his manner was that of a man who has been harried beyond endurance. ‘There is no answer, *senhor*.’ A lizard lay panting on the boards of the verandah.

‘Try again,’ I said. ‘Keep trying.’

He gestured hopelessly and wound the crank. There was a tiny biplane knee-deep in the grass by the runway, and nothing else whatever; but for the biplane no aircraft might have touched down at Presidente Prudente for twenty years. I sat on the bench on the verandah of the hut which was the air station and searched the vast white sky till my eyes ached.

‘No?’

‘Nothing, *senhor*.’

The pilot of the plane from Londrina, who had set me down here at Presidente Prudente, shrugged when I asked him about a plane going north. ‘We go to Presidente Wenceslau,’ he said, ‘and then back to Londrina.’

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But of course there may be another plane this afternoon. Ferdi!' he called. The co-pilot thrust his head out of the cockpit window. 'There's another flight this afternoon, isn't there?'

'Almost certainly,' the co-pilot answered.

'Where is it you want to go?' the pilot asked me.

'Campo Grande.'

'Not really.' He seemed a little depressed.

'At what time does this afternoon's plane almost certainly leave?' I asked.

'Do you have to go to Campo Grande?'

'I have a ticket.' A touch of the *fait accompli* rarely fails in Brazil. 'They told me at Londrina the plane went there.'

'They know nothing, *senhor*, less than nothing, I assure you. The only person who knows where the plane is going is the pilot, believe me, *senhor*, and there are times when even the pilot . . . You have business in Campo Grande?'

'I have.'

'May I enquire the nature of the business?'

'I'm a writer.'

'Ah.' His relief was plain. 'Then that is simple. You wouldn't like the place at all. I assure you there is nothing whatever to write about in Campo Grande.'

Campo Grande was clearly an attractive place. I insisted on going there as firmly as I was able.

'Then you had better speak to the commandant, *senhor*. He will try to telephone and instruct the pilot of this afternoon's plane to call here and pick you up.'

So I hauled my suitcase across the airstrip to the hut

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which was the air station of Presidente Prudente. The plane had started up and in a hurricane of dust had left; for a moment it glittered in the sky and then was lost to sight. I was alone with the commandant.

Now he hung up for the last time.

'There is no answer,' he said.

The telephone rang immediately.

'*Olé!*' said the commandant into the receiver. 'Presidente Prudente.'

There followed an exchange of invective of which I heard but one side, and that in rapid Portuguese. It appeared that the commandant of the airfield whom this one had been trying to contact had been endeavouring no less persistently to answer. Presently, however, it was all settled: they would prevail on the pilot of this afternoon's plane to call at Presidente Prudente and pick me up; he was known to be an accommodating fellow and would no doubt do his utmost. With that I had to be content.

'*Obrigado,*' I said.

'*Nada, senhor.*' The commandant wiped the sweat from his neck and face. '*Nada.*'

'At what time will it call?'

The glow of achievement ebbed from his face; he looked at me bleakly.

'Never mind,' I said. 'This afternoon.'

'This afternoon,' he agreed, nodding.

I glanced at my watch: it was a little after half-past one. The commandant disappeared round the back of the hut, to relieve himself, as I thought; a moment later, to my alarm, I heard an engine start up. I trotted round the hut and saw the commandant's battered jeep vanish



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round the bend in a cloud of dust. I shouted, but it was no use, he had gone. After a while I went back, with the airfield all to myself.

For a moment I contemplated walking into the town, wherever it might be, with my suitcase on my shoulder; the heat precluded any such foolishness. Then I thought about hiding it; there was nowhere to hide it. There was also the appalling possibility of missing the plane, if and when it should arrive. I sat on the bench and with a rumbling stomach thought about the things I would have liked to eat and drink.

After a time I left the verandah and wandered about the airfield. I was glad to have rammed a hat on the back of my head, for the sun was pitiless; it bored through one's shirt, the heat of the earth rose into one's face, to breathe at all was like inhaling a flame that shrivelled one's lungs. In the ditch that circled the field, presumably for purposes of drainage, there was a snake, green and black, which lifted its triangular head to eye me for a moment, tongue flickering at the neat blunt snout; it made no effort to climb the walls of the ditch and attack; it moved slowly away into the shade. The thin dry grasses whispered about my shoes as I wandered over to the little biplane I had noticed from the hut. But it was a woebegone ruin; the tyres had been stripped from the landing wheels, one wing hung loose, the cockpit was dense with spiders' web. Suppose there is no plane this afternoon? I thought. What if no plane ever calls at Presidente Prudente again? Why should it? There was no reason on earth for so improbable an event, so far as I could see.

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I went back to the verandah and stretched out on the bench, but sleep was impossible. I sat and smoked. The shadow of a cloud moved across the airstrip and a small spiral of dust rose and travelled a few yards and then subsided again. A long way away above the low hills a solitary vulture circled. I watched the tremendous sky. I remember thinking vacantly: what am I doing here? I live in a flat of three rooms in Regent's Park, N.W.8, where my windows overlook the canal. What in God's name am I doing here on this lonely, scorched airstrip in the middle of Brazil? How did I get here?

One selects a certain moment in a story at which to begin it because that moment appears to be the right moment, not necessarily because it is the first. If the story is a good one it has not a first moment anywhere, nor a last. So I choose that moment on the airfield at Presidente Prudente because it was the first time I had stopped to ask myself what I was doing there, where I had been, where I was going, and above all, why.

One gloomy, moist afternoon in December I called at the Bolivian Consulate in London to apply for a *visa*. The business done, I made to leave. As I left, a man sitting on the couch in the waiting-room looked up and nodded and said: 'Going to Bolivia?'

'Yes, I hope so.' He was young and tall, with large strong hands and fair hair and an amiable grin.

We chatted for a little while. 'By the way,' he asked presently, 'how are you going to get there?'

'Overland. Across Brazil,' I answered.

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His expression changed slightly. 'Have you been to South America before?'

'Never.'

'It's rather a big place, you know. The distances . . .'

He was puzzled and curious. 'Do you mind if I ask what you intend to do when you get there?'

I had faced this question before, unsuccessfully. 'Not at all: travel about.'

'Travel about?'

'Yes.' I could see he thought me unbalanced.

'Well, anyway, do look me up if ever you get to La Paz, won't you?'

I promised to do so and he gave me his card.

Outside in Grosvenor Gardens I stood under a street lamp and looked at the card in the rain. I thought it a joke at first, but it wasn't. Boldly and gravely it read:

RONALD B. CLARKE

*Vice-Chairman and Managing Director  
The Fabulosa Mines Consolidated  
La Paz*

Now I hold that any person or body of persons with the wit, the imagination, the bright daring, or whatever quality it is one needs to call by such a name an undertaking dedicated to the tedious business of satisfying a group of shareholders, should receive early recognition. There is a name to dream on.

I thought about it a good deal in the days that followed. Could there possibly exist in this dreary world a group of mines, or even one mine, one would do, with the rich effrontery to call itself *Fabulosa Consolidated*? What kind of mine could it be, supposing it to exist?

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Silver? Tin? Gold? Or was it only some preposterous bubble, some inglorious scheme for the fleecing of romantic small investors? The Vice-Chairman and Managing Director had not had the air of a confidence trickster: he had had a solid, decent, earthy look.

We are hard to hoodwink nowadays: we like to see, to have, to pull to pieces: even then we mistrust. But to see is a beginning. And I wanted to see this place with my own eyes. If somewhere there truly existed a mine, or indeed anything at all, called Fabulosa Consolidated, then some inner hunger would be satisfied for ever. If, somewhere in the Eastern Cordillera far up a remote ravine in the Andes, there was a hole in the mountainside by this name, then a wound whose infliction had been imperceptible, a slow chafing over the years whose effect one felt only in loss of blood, would be stanchd, and a grain of hope restored.

So as fortuitously as this my journey acquired a purpose. It was something of a relief, as a matter of fact, that it should have done so, for during the period of preparation I had been uneasily aware that my list of necessities included everything pertaining to the journey except a purpose. I was not, for instance, looking for God. Nor was I on the heels of my soul, which to the firmest of my belief was not lost, or at all events had not got lost in South America. I was not fired with a wish to trace the Amazon to its source, and I was quite prepared to leave head-hunters, head-shrinkers and the like to their own devices. I did not even hanker for death, of which I have seen too much to like it. In fact I was travelling only to enrich the heart a little, and perhaps to jettison

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some of the rubble which accumulates when the mind spends too long ploughing the same furrow.

There was another reason. For a long time I had had in mind the theme of a book which I very much wanted to write. I had pondered it and planned it and even nibbled delectably at its fringes, writing a page or two at odd times over a period of years. It seemed to me to be a theme — story is probably a better word — that would, in its writing, render all the rest of the heartbreak worth while. A lovely thing to contemplate. I had watched it grow and take shape. I had become aware that everything I had written up to now had been in the nature of five-finger exercises — a series of troubled preliminaries, by way of practice. Now it was pressing hard; it nudged my elbow day and night. The time appeared to be ripe.

So the journey was a matter also of clearing one's desk. I wanted to be rid of the nameless impedimenta with which it was cluttered. I wanted to have to make some effort in respect of a few of the elemental problems: to move, to eat, to stay alive, to feel sharply, to be afraid and not to be afraid — so that my story, when I would come to write it, would rest not on the surface flotsam but on solid stuff. Time and again I had been brought up short, stunned by the praise lavished on books of one kind or another which had seemed to me trivial and petty, books which gave off a sound like the scratching of a tabby-cat's claws on a window-pane, crying to be let in, books which seemed to me to titillate the surface of the intellect and leave the emotions altogether undisturbed. It was bewildering that they should be thought so

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acute and important and profound; but surely so many could not be wrong? Clearly the fault lay nearer home — I must have been heading in the wrong direction all this time. If, then, I could find a place where there were no sign-posts at all, no precedents, no echoes, I might perhaps find the right direction again: so it seemed to me. Probably it would lead to a dead end, but it wouldn't be over-crowded. The one I had fetched up in now was densely populated.

There is nothing unusual about sitting before a fire on a winter evening with an atlas; a great many people have done it. On one such night I chose a name on a map because it was rich and barbarous and because the place whose name this was seemed infinitely far away; it lay in an extensive swamp roughly at the geometrical centre of South America. The name, though it no longer matters, was Corumbà. So be it. I would go to Corumbà, in order that I might be prepared to write a book about London.

As a process of reasoning this seemed to me to be eminently sound. For my circle of acquaintance, however, it was not only nonsensical but downright irksome. I was a man of forty, surely past the idiocy of youth — heading fast, in fact, for middle age; it was high time I settled down. What was I really going to South America for? Useless to answer that the choice was quite arbitrary — that any other country equally raw and new would do. I had to have a mission. If I was not running away from something, some calamitous upheaval, preferably emotional, then it followed *ipso facto* that I was running towards something. Was I not going to look for Colonel

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Fawcett perhaps? No. Then it must be that I was privy to the whereabouts of an Inca treasure, some Jesuit hoard buried in the jungles of the Paraguay River. No? People found it extraordinarily irritating that somebody should go all that way for no good reason.

Now, however, my journey had acquired a purpose. I was going to South America to establish the existence of Fabulosa, and it was a great solace to us all.

One dark, inspissated January afternoon, then, the ship was led out of Tilbury Dock and turned loose. We swung into Lower Hope Reach and headed for the estuary and the sea. The shore lights shone dimly through the falling snow. I remember standing on the deck, quite alone in the gloom, to watch the low dim line of the marshes of the Kentish bank flow past. They were hardly visible, but it did not matter; I knew them very well, having cycled across them many times while preparing to write the novel whose modest success had paid my passage in this ship. I never liked the book and still do not, nor any of the others; it is an awful thing never to like what one has written, and it weighs heavily. But there is always another chance.

To stay in a city as beautiful as Rio de Janeiro and not like it is widely considered to be a heresy. For millions of otherwise sane Brazilians, and some others as well, Rio is a Mecca to be mentioned with a glistening eye and a subconscious obeisance, while the sight of Sugar Loaf Mountain itself renders them temporarily incapable of speech.

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It is all perfectly true; Rio keeps faith with the traveller. The bay by moonlight is something unbelievable; the beaches and night clubs of Copocabana are rightly renowned; the city is full of beautiful women all with a profound awareness of sex and its delights; the air throbs with the metallic rhythm of the samba and the promise of tropical debauchery. Excellent. For the rest, it is without exception the most brazen, callous, noisy and unlikeable city I have ever been in. I have heard others, in a whisper, say the same.

Now this is odd, because the *carioca* himself is a charming and friendly person blessed with a nice, wry sense of humour. But he must also be of a forgiving nature, for the climate of his beloved Rio, the streets, the din, the cruelty — everything to do with the outward life of the city, is very hard to forgive. The pedestrian, the *carioca* says dryly, has God on his side. He means that nobody else is, and he is telling the truth. In Rio the pedestrian has no rights whatever. The streets teem with large fast cars, all of which are driven by their owners on a very elementary principle: stamp on the accelerator, press the horn, and go like mad. The voice of Rio is a multiple klaxon, its chorus the scream of tyres and the whine of the ambulance, with which the city resounds day and night. The better to pander to this oppressive characteristic there is a law to the effect that all participants in a street accident are at once taken into custody whether culpable or not, there to await the trial which will not reach the courts for days or even weeks; nothing could be more effectively designed to encourage the policy of hit and run. Moreover, any person so humane, or so



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foolish, as to assist the victim before the arrival of the 'experts' is also incarcerated. I saw two such mishaps; the victims writhed in the road and their blood ran along the gutters; a small crowd gathered; but nobody touched the injured men. One night I was driving back with a friend from a place on the outskirts of the city. The headlights picked out the figure of a man apparently dying or dead at the side of the road. I suggested we should stop and see what could be done to help him. My friend peered about lest there should be any policemen in the vicinity. 'Have to be careful,' he muttered, 'or we'll both land in jail.' Happily the man was only asleep.

However, not very many years ago a strange thing happened in Rio. It is well worth recounting here for the light it throws on a certain aspect of the Brazilian character; it is a quality of which one is always aware but which is at first rather hard to identify.

This is the story:

At the end of the Avenida Atlântica, which runs round the bay of Copacabana, there is a fortress on the edge of the sea. Early one spring morning in 1922 the residents of the neighbouring streets were awakened by the rumble of heavy artillery. Standing out to sea in the morning mist were Brazil's two battleships, the *São Paulo* and the *Minas Geraes*, which appeared to be engaged in a long-range duel with the guns of the fortress. So they were, for the garrison of the fortress had mutinied.

The city stopped work; the newspapers issued special editions every few hours. It seemed that the uprising had been planned on a national scale, but at the last minute

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the majority of the rebels had backed out; only the garrison of the fortress of Copacabana stuck to its guns, which happened to be very big ones — big enough and of a sufficient range, at all events, to drive the battleships beyond their reach. The guns could also be turned on the city. In the course of the ensuing pandemonium a telephone rang in the Ministry of War, which lies in Rio itself, and a crisp voice said:

‘This is Lieutenant Campos, officer commanding the fortress of Copacabana. I have to advise you that in fifteen minutes exactly we shall land a shell in the courtyard of the Ministry of War to demonstrate that any attempt to storm the fortress will be countered by the destruction of the offices of the government.’

A meeting of the General Staff was held; the Ministry of War was hurriedly evacuated. Fifteen minutes later a 14-inch shell landed in the centre of the courtyard and opened up a large crater.

The government troops surrounding the fortress were ordered to withdraw to a distance of two miles and there to take up positions with a view to starving the garrison out. This was done. The ensuing *impasse* lasted three weeks.

The strangest things about this altogether strange episode, which was not yet over, were the reasons which impelled these young men to act as they did. It was not a mutiny in the military sense, except that they wore uniforms. It was a revolt in the civic, or perhaps political, sense. Yet they had no political aims; nor had they any positive programme of action. Very simply, they rebelled against the corruption, lethargy and incompet-

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ence of a government which to their minds was standing between Brazil and her future.

The whole country waited, and on the last day of July, three weeks after they had shut themselves in, the gates of the fortress opened and a hundred and fifty soldiers marched out under a white flag and surrendered. But there were no officers with them. Eleven lieutenants remained in the fortress and, with them, six N.C.O.s. A few minutes later the telephone of the Chief of Staff rang in the Ministry and Lieutenant Campos said:

‘I have the honour to inform you, sir, that we are about to come out.’

The General said: ‘Quite so. Your men surrendered a few minutes ago.’

‘But we are not surrendering, sir,’ Lieutenant Campos said. ‘We are coming out to fight.’

‘Fight whom?’ the General said. ‘I have three regiments surrounding you.’

‘We are coming out to fight. With your permission, sir, I will now ring off.’

Presently the gates of the fortress opened and eleven lieutenants and six other ranks marched out, each armed with a rifle. The flag had been taken down, cut into seventeen pieces, and every man wore his piece of the flag over his heart. They formed up in an open line across the wide avenida and advanced. Nothing else moved; the long road was deserted, but at the end of each street running into the avenida the citizens of Rio stood watching. There was no sound but the steady marching of the feet of the seventeen men.

At the end of one of the connecting roads another

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curious thing happened. A man named Corrêa, a Brazilian who had just disembarked with his family from a ship that had arrived from Europe that morning, asked what was afoot. He waited for the line of men to reach him and then approached them. The scrap of dialogue which ensued has the over-dramatic terseness of the true epic.

‘Where are you going?’ Corrêa said.

‘Towards death.’

‘What for?’

‘To save Brazil.’

‘Then I will go with you.’

One of the lieutenants gave him a rifle while he, the lieutenant, drew his pistol. They walked on again: there were now eighteen.

Altogether they marched nearly two miles along the silent road, and at last they approached the sandbagged positions of the government troops which barred the way. An officer rose and, lifting his arm, cried: ‘Halt and surrender!’

The eleven lieutenants, six N.C.O.s and one civilian continued to march forward.

‘Halt!’ the officer shouted. ‘We shall open fire!’

The little party walked on. None of the officers of the government troops could bring himself to give the order to shoot. The only order at that time was issued by Lieutenant Campos, whose command was: ‘Double march! Fire!’

The eighteen broke into a run, shooting from the waist as they went. They were very near to the sandbags when the machine guns opened fire. None reached the sandbags.

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That was the end of the incident, but not of the story. The eleven *tenentes* gave Brazil a new word — Tenentism. Tenentism swept the nation; it became a political movement which eventually overthrew the government and for a few short months endeavoured to put into effect its heroic but vague principles. It failed, but it failed only in practice, for it arose from, and therefore appealed to, something fundamental in the Brazilian character, and that is unlikely to change. Now it has a name. Tenentism is naïve, it is hopelessly idealistic, and the Brazilians are the first to joke about it, but it remains a force and among these intensely likeable people one is always aware of it.

I stayed no longer in São Paulo than I had done in Rio, though I liked it better. But it is a commercial city, the fastest-growing city, I believe, in the world, seething with activity, resounding with the construction of higher and higher sky-scrapers — very impressive, but not what I was looking for. All about me people talked of cotton and prices, cattle and prices, coffee and prices. All three were soaring, it appeared. People were making millions, millions. 'If you want to see a boom town,' a man told me, 'go and have a look at Londrina, in the coffee belt.'

A day or two later I bought a ticket to Londrina.

The hills beyond the airstrip were low and green. Where the earth was naked it was a deep crimson colour. In the west, a long way away, the hem of the sky smouldered.

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‘What’s that?’ I asked my companion. We had both joined the plane at São Paulo. He was a young North American, pleasant and simple in his conversation, but, I suspected, rough and tough and cold in his ambitions; he had come to the coffee country to buy land. ‘It looks like a forest fire.’

‘It is,’ he answered. ‘They’re burning down the jungle. Can’t you smell it?’

The faint, aromatic odour mingled with the pall of red dust that hangs over Northern Paraná day and night. The sky, which always seems so much wider in Brazil than it does elsewhere, ripped open here and there where a blade of sunlight broke through, sagged dramatically over the split-pine shack that was the air station of Londrina. We went into the hut and drank *pinga*, the local liquor, at the makeshift bar in the corner.

The air reeked of black tobacco and sweat and burning forest. Baggage and freight lay about the dusty floor awaiting claimants, some of whom were already picking it over. Men of every colour from coal-black to sallow-white jostled about the desk; most of them wore half-length snake boots, wide hats, cotton shirt and pants, and all were stained a lurid crimson colour — short, hard-bodied fellows for the most part, abrupt in manner, with hoarse voices and restless eyes. A Negro touted bus tickets for the ride into town. Three tiny Japanese children, each with a label tied to her wrist, stood among the dusty boots and legs and watched the man who wore a battered topee, who evidently was an official of some kind; he slammed the doors as the plane on the runway, starting up and swinging about, flung a

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wall of red sand at the hut, a good proportion of which was nevertheless siphoned through the cracks in the timber. An old woman sat with a hen in her lap and stared across the raw confusion. It was the rawness of the people and the place that struck you first and hardest.

'When is the coffee picked?' I asked. My companion's name was Bill.

'May,' he said. 'You should see this place then. They bring in armies, whole armies of pickers. Armies of dames, too, to pick the pickers. They lay on special trains for 'em. May is the time the money begins to move. I tell you, you should see this place in May. Boy, it's rough.'

The Negro was bawling something in the open door and we went out to the ramshackle bus in the yard. We bounced and jolted up the track between the plantations. And suddenly the rain fell. It fell solidly, thundering on the roof of the bus, splashing into the dry earth like bullets. When he could no longer see a yard beyond the radiator the driver pulled up and lit a cigarette and we sat and waited, perspiring generously. The rain came down as if it would pound the bus into the earth. Through the streaming windscreen I made out a huddle of shacks and then, beyond, a single, white sky-scraper; in fact it was no more than five storeys high, but it was very new. Presently the cataract let up a little and we went on, axle-deep now in blood-red water. It reminded me very much of moving into a bombed Italian village in the rain, and the dilapidated shanties were the homes of the villagers and the tall white building was the fascist town hall which would always, somehow, survive the shelling.

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'Drop me here, will you?' Bill called to the driver. 'See you,' he told me briefly. He splashed away toward the buildings.

It rained on and off for three days. I spent a good deal of time in the town's saloons drinking *pinga* and eating *farinha* — rice and beans, and one of the least interesting dishes I have ever come across. One evening I was invited to dinner, at Bill's instigation, by an American Baptist missionary with the curious name of Clinkscales. He was a quiet, gentle man of indeterminate age, with rimless glasses, blue eyes and a remote, slightly tired manner. He had given some fifteen years of his life to Londrina and had watched it grow from its foundation. 'A countryman of yours started all this,' he said dreamily. 'Mr. Thomas. There was nothing here when Mr. Thomas came. Just forest and scrub and snakes. . . .'

Thomas was sent out by a British land company. He surveyed the country on horseback, broke it up into small holdings, acquired a bankrupt railway and extended it, and founded the town of Londrina, now the virtual capital of the coffee lands. 'In those years,' Mr. Clinkscales went on, 'they burned coffee in thousands of tons at a time, trying to keep up the price.' His soft, kindly voice gave the tale a touch of improbability, as if he were dreaming aloud. 'But Mr. Thomas just kept right on, developing the land. . . .'

The tide turned a year or two before the war, when the flow of settlers, mostly refugees, happily coincided with a rise in prices. The value of the land, too, this legendary *terra roxa* of the coffee belt, also began to rise as money and rumours of money spread. It was at about



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this time that President Vargas came to the conclusion that government ownership of the railway was a highly desirable thing for 'strategic reasons,' and under the veiled threat of expropriation the company was forced to sell it. Not too long afterwards the British government needed the value of the land in dollars, also for strategic reasons; the company sold out to a group of business men in São Paulo who knew a good thing when they saw one.

I asked when the land rush had really begun.

'Not till after the war, I'd say.' For that was when men of every colour and tongue in the world, tramps and refugees, speculators and fools, honest planters, swindlers and adventurers, doctors and bank clerks with a few hundred pounds in savings, bought or badgered their way through the immigration laws and headed for this small strip of crimson earth four hundred miles long by a hundred across, where, so it was said, a man might make himself passing rich by his own endeavours in the space of time it takes a coffee tree to produce its first full crop, namely, five years.

'How long do you think it will go on?'

'Well, out there in the west they're hitting sand now. The earth isn't red any more, it's grey. And there's the frontier, too, just over the hills, the Paraguayan frontier. So there's no knowing.' He went on absently: 'There's a deal of talk just now about what you folk are doing with coffee in East Africa. They call it the menace, here, the menace.'

'Do the police have much trouble keeping order?'

'Not more than you'd expect, I guess.'

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‘How much?’

He smiled. ‘Well, Londrina is orderly enough these days. It’s out in the west, in the new lands, that there’s trouble. A man buys a few acres of forest and when he gets there he finds a squatter has moved in before him. The police don’t happen to be around, so he tries to eject the squatter by himself, with an axe or a gun. Then there’s violence. It’s only to be expected in this kind of place, where there’s a lot of fellows aiming to get rich quick. They vary, of course. Usually you can tell just by looking at the plantations what kind of man the owner is. Tidiest and cleanest are the Japs. Then come the Germans. Then the rest. Some of them are good men, some bad. Some honest, some dishonest. And when they make good they don’t change much either way. Some are just ignorant. There’s a saying they have about the coffee millionaires . . . they dropped out of coffee trees into Cadillacs. And I suppose some of them did, at that. But’ — he looked up with a smile — ‘we have a fine new chapel here in Londrina, a very fine chapel which I’d like to have you see. They gave me the money and the bricks to build it with.’

I thanked him for his hospitality and kindness and walked back to the wooden boarding-house where I was staying. Fifty yards beyond that staring white skyscraper the main street ended and there was nothing but the rutted sea of crimson earth, a few shacks, and the regimented monotony of the plantations.

The next morning over a breakfast of *farinha* and coffee I came into conversation with a dark, sharp-faced young man whom I later discovered to be an Algerian;

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he came from Sétif; probably he had jumped a ship in Rio or Santos; at all events he was now foreman of a sizable plantation and, having one or two calls to make that morning, he offered me a seat in his truck. He was a mine of information.

It is only in the west, now, that the small planter can make a start, for there where the forests are still virgin land can be bought at a reasonable price. There are no roads and no machines, so he must set to by himself and with an axe and a saw cut down the forest covering his land, which, when it has dried in the sun, he sets fire to. It was the smoke of these fires under the fringe of the sky that I had noticed from the airstrip. But he cannot wait to clear away the charred timber; he plants his seeds immediately, among the trunks of the dead trees, for these will not burn, either because they are of a species too tough to burn or because they are still green; in any event it costs more to shift them than the timber is worth on the market. So the planter leaves them there. As we ground along the tracks between the endless plantations that morning, the earth as far as the eye could see was littered with huge, bleached tree trunks, like the sarcophagi of a forgotten breed of giants.

Yet it left one unmoved. Perhaps the fault was mine. I was interested, even excited by some of this, but in no way involved. The coffee lands have already grown away from the womb they sprang from, not upwards towards a stature of their own, but obliquely, becoming part of a neighbouring civilisation which is familiar, all too familiar. So it seemed to me. I wanted to be on the way again.

‘Are there any roads going north?’

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‘North?’ He shook his head and grinned, showing his broken teeth. It was warm in the truck’s cabin and threads of sweat ran down the crimson dust on his face. ‘I’ve never been.’

There were no railways either. I came to know later that the Brazilians are not interested in railroads. The era of the railway is finished, they say, not altogether without reason: why should we waste our capital on railways now? They explain their failure to exploit the huge mineral deposits that lie in Brazilian soil equally neatly: how can we when we have no railways? The roads, too, however, remain unmade; there was a sound argument to cover this deficiency as well:

‘Go by air,’ he suggested. ‘We have fine airlines.’

The only alternative, which was to make the journey on mule or horseback, would have taken several weeks. Moreover the age and condition of some of the planes flying over the interior of Brazil and Bolivia are such as to satisfy any but the most abnormal lust for hazardous travel. I bought a passage to Campo Grande: it was only at Presidente Prudente that I discovered the plane did not go there. But it was the place where the journey truly began.

AT four o'clock a surprising thing happened. The double doors in the wall to the right of the bench I sat on, which I had supposed to be those of a waiting-room, or perhaps the commandant's office, were of a sudden thrown open from the inside, and a small, bony man with prominent black eyebrows and a bald head stood behind what appeared to be a counter, yawning and scratching his chest through his gaping shirt. A cloud of flies had followed him from the back room; while he yawned and stretched they buzzed about him.

He was in no way taken aback to find a customer on his doorstep; when, however, in my excitement I addressed him unthinkingly in Italian and he absently answered in an Italian scarcely less clumsy than my own, then we looked at one another.

'You are Italian?' he said.

Clearly he was not, or he would have remarked the poverty of my Italian in the heartening manner the Italians have, that is, with a compliment to its richness. In parenthesis, to any who hold that with a knowledge of Italian and French one can get along quite well in Brazil I must say, they lie; there is one language and that is obstinately Portuguese. I mimed and gesticulated my way for several thousand miles till I had picked up a few words of Portuguese, found it exceedingly wearing, and remember this occasion, on the airstrip at Presidente

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Prudente, as the only one in which Italian was of the slightest use.

‘Are you?’ I asked.

‘No, *senhor*. Brazilian.’ His father, he said, had been born in Calabria and had emigrated to Brazil, to become a taxi-driver in São Paulo.

‘How did you fetch up in this place?’

‘I struck out on my own.’ He savoured his own folly, rolling it across his tongue, and found it not displeasing. ‘In a land of pioneers one must strike out.’ The beady ironic eyes moved over my face. ‘What can I serve you?’

‘What have you got?’

‘We have salami sandwiches,’ he suggested. ‘And we have cheese sandwiches. We have also sandwiches of salami and cheese.’

‘You put them together?’

‘The cheese lends the salami flavour, and vice versa.’

I ordered a salami-and-cheese sandwich. He nodded, yawned again, shook himself, squared his narrow shoulders and prepared to serve me.

The flies, maddened by the reek of cheese, hummed about us in clouds, colliding with one another, colliding with one’s face. I watched him cut a sandwich of heroic proportions, knowing it was dangerous to eat it, too hungry to care; as a matter of fact no ill came of it, nor of any of the offal I ate in the course of the next two months; indeed the journey was altogether the healthiest imaginable; I was bitten by a parrot at Ruana and by a spider in Corumbà, and by innumerable mosquitoes and insects of various kinds here and there; these apart,

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nothing worse happened to me than the appalling cold I caught in the unheated tumbrel supplied by British Railways for the run from St. Pancras to Tilbury Dock.

He completed the sandwich and mounted it on a plate.

'The sandwich, *senhor*.' He looked at it with distaste and moved it across the counter. 'Delicious,' he added.

He watched me as I bit into it, watched me as I swallowed the first mouthful, and then said :

'What do you think of the flavour?'

'It's interesting.'

I bit again and he averted his gaze. A moment later I was attacked by a fierce thirst.

'I suppose you haven't anything cold to drink?'

'Certainly. Wine, beer. . . .'

'Cold?'

'*Ben fresco*.'

And from somewhere in that foetid little room at the back, in whose doorway there now appeared a brown, half-naked woman with a wholly naked child in her arms, he produced two sealed bottles of ice-cold beer, a feat which I took to be little short of a miracle, all things considered. We drank them together and basked on the bar. He caressed his chest and the woman in the doorway made small crooning sounds to her child. An idyllic scene.

A few minutes later the commandant reappeared, glistening with sweat and plainly in an abominable temper; not only had I upset the schedule of the airways company by insisting on travelling to Campo Grande; I had also broken into the commandant's siesta, and this was not to be borne lightly. His manner was venomous.

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He weighed my baggage, charged me twice the sum he should have charged for the excess weight, and then waspishly demanded that I open my suitcase for his inspection.

‘My baggage has already been examined,’ I said.

‘By whom?’

‘By the customs authorities.’

‘Where?’

‘In Rio.’ Its passage through the customs on that occasion had been much facilitated by an American girl of signal beauty who took up a languorous position on the counter and chatted with the official throughout the examination. This time there were no such distractions.

‘In Presidente Prudente, *senhor*, I am in charge.’ I knew he half hoped I would resist; rage requires opposition. ‘Be so good as to open.’

I resisted, no less angry now than he was himself. ‘I’m damned if I will.’

Quivering with rage, he embarked on a harangue on the subject of South American customs regulations, some of which are evidently inter-state, which I had not known till then. I understood very little of his discourse, but it was clear the affair was blowing up into a minor brawl. We flamed at one another, he in Portuguese, I in a mixture of French and Italian; neither understood a word the other said.

It was then for the first time on the journey, and incidentally the last, that I took out the booklet I had bought in London as an afterthought, which claimed to contain all one was likely to need in Portugal, neatly set out and couched in phrases of such antique and jewelled fatuity



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that the mind baulks. *At The Cloakroom*, it said roundly. My hands were shaking, I could scarcely see the print. However, this was no time for textual fumbling. With as grand an expression as I could muster, I read out to the commandant in Portuguese the first phrase that came to hand: '*I am compelled to report the incident to the British Consul. Send for the Station Master.*'

For my own part my cause thereafter was a lost one. Its effect on the commandant was no less paralysing. He gazed at me stunned. I heard him expel the breath from his nostrils. Then pointing at the book in my hands he uttered a scream of laughter that could be heard across the airfield. He slapped his rump, pointed at the book, and laughed till the tears ran down his plump face. I, too, was laughing hysterically and for a moment or two we could not speak. I flung open my suitcase.

'Inspect as you will——'

'Quite unnecessary, *senhor*——'

'But I insist.'

'Never.'

We carried the book to the bar, where we were joined by the proprietor, and spent an unusually diverting half-hour reading out to one another, rocking with laughter, its joyful contents.

At five o'clock the plane touched down and, followed by a bank of whirling dust, taxied towards the hut. I shook hands with the commandant and the proprietor of the bar with expressions of lasting mutual esteem, and embarked. It was only as I climbed the ladder that I noticed how very small and old the aircraft was.

### 3

FROM Presidente Prudente to Campo Grande is a distance of about four hundred miles. For most of it you fly over level forest and swamp. There are no roads and no tracks, except between one Indian settlement and another, or one farm and another, where they exist at all, and the one single-track railway serving the whole of the interior of Brazil runs east and west. Still, communications are not quite as meagre as they might seem; the air services of Brazil are plentiful, and the rivers are good, if slow, highways. In so far as I had made any plans I had intended originally to travel south from São Paulo to the Iguassu Falls, thence by river steamer up the Paraguay, but this would have entailed a dull voyage of ten days or more on a steamer from whose decks, I was told, there was nothing more to see than the mud-flats, then the green twin walls of the forest, notable only for their monotony.

There were seven people in the plane, whose capacity appeared to be perhaps ten. There was a man with a bristling teutonic neck who might have been a planter, a young Brazilian of jaundiced complexion and thin black hair, two priests, one of whom, since he wore a red skull-cap, I took to be a cardinal, and Mr. Soong and his guide.

Mr. Soong, beside whom I found a seat, was a well-fed Chinese of marked blandness of manner who came

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from Hong Kong. He was here in Brazil, he said, waving a plump hand at the window, 'just to have a look round, a look round.'

I took to Mr. Soong immediately, at least partly on the score of his guide, whose name was Sebastião. Mr. Soong called him 'Comissario' with the utmost gravity. Where Mr. Soong had picked up Sebastian, or Sebastian had attached himself to Mr. Soong, I was never able to discover; if you were looking for Sebastian, I think, you would head intuitively for the docks of Santos. He was without exception the only man I have ever known who contrived to have a receding brow, a receding chin, and moreover a receding nose, at one and the same time. Sebastian's face put one in mind of a torpedo or some such missile which, while travelling at speed, has struck an immovable object, failed to explode and suffered a prodigious dent in the war-head. As if this did not suffice he had also a slight cast in the left eye, a multitude of gold teeth, and altogether an aspect of such blurred depravity that a conscientious policeman would have clapped him in gaol on sight. Happily he was at large and carried with him a promise of comedy so rich that one was drawn to him irresistibly. This it was, I suspect, that had prompted Mr. Soong to engage him, on the principle, mediaeval but sound enough, that a man of substance travels with a jester.

Sebastian did his best, and his best was good. Every now and then in the course of that awful flight he would hoist one eye above the back of the seat in front of Mr. Soong, signal earthward and say informatively:

'Jungle. Is the jungle.'

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Mr. Soong nodded and smiled pleasurably.

'Plane go down, all deads,' said Sebastian. 'Is jungle.'

Mr. Soong giggled happily.

'Quagmire,' said Sebastian, signalling violently. 'Is much quagmire. Plane go down, all eaten by serpents. Brazil very big place, fulla serpents.'

Mr. Soong closed his eyes in total rapture.

And then presently: 'Ah,' Sebastian said, striking a note of warning and signalling upwards. 'Aha. Storm comes. Big tempests in Brazil, all the time. Bang, bang.'

Mr. Soong said dreamily: 'Sebastian is my guide.'

The plane bucketed a little.

'Where have you come from?' I asked Mr. Soong.

'We come from Londrina,' he said. 'The coffee country. Velly interesting, Londrina. We had a lovely time.'

'What happened?'

'Nothing. Sebastian was negotiating on my behalf, for a plantation.'

I asked him if he had bought one.

'No, Sebastian just negotiated. So many swindlers and Sebastian: very enjoyable, most interesting.' He smiled and sighed that it was over. 'One day I sell Sebastian,' he said sadly; 'or perhaps not. Maybe I shall take him back to Hong Kong.'

The little plane dipped suddenly and rose, shuddering. Beyond the window the green earth flowed past far beneath. I watched the wing tilt as we banked steeply and then levelled out. I saw the sulky black clouds we were heading for, or perhaps trying to avoid. We began to lose height.

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I have never liked air travel and I liked it even less at this moment; it is impossible to *live* in an aircraft, even for a short time; it involves a suspension of life and of the faculties; on earth you may move and take your senses with you; in the air as a passenger the nearest thing to an emotion you feel is the vague alarm that follows a drop in height.

Sebastian's dilapidated features hove up above the seat in front.

'Tk, tk, tk,' he said anxiously. 'Big storm. Pilot fly here, there, everywhere, but storm just the same. Plane go down, all finish.'

Mr. Soong nodded and smiled. 'Keep me informed, *comissario*.'

'Yes, I keep you informed,' Sebastian said heroically. 'I do that for you like mad, do not disturb.'

As a matter of fact Sebastian was quite right. Planes occasionally do crash in the forests, and there are never any survivors, for even if the passengers are not killed in the crash itself they are seldom found. The trees close over the wreckage; one simply disappears through the green carpet below to perish, if not outright, then of starvation or fever or insect bite or any of the thousand more or less disagreeable deaths the forest abounds in. Since no wreckage is visible from the air, search parties on horseback or foot have little idea which direction to head in; so they stay at home. If the survivors of the crash are lucky there may be a settlement or habitation of some kind in the vicinity; if not, then they start walking in whichever direction appeals to them most. Usually they do not get far. In the jungle there is no

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game; the jungle is cold, dank and dark. There are insects and snakes, and in the upper branches of the trees there are wandering tribes of monkeys, but these you rarely see. Game is found only on the fringes of the forest and on the *serra* — the higher ground where vegetation is less dense — and in the marshes.

‘We go on,’ Sebastian informed us, true to his word.

The plane struck another air pocket and fell sickeningly. Conversation among the passengers, which had been diminishing, died away altogether. We pitched and rolled. A light winked in the panel above the door of the pilot’s cabin and we fastened our safety belts, smiled diligently at one another, and gazed out of the windows.

‘Pretty rough,’ Sebastian said. ‘Just the same, we go on.’ He was pinned to his seat by his safety belt; we heard him, but we did not see him.

We were flying immediately beneath a roof of swollen black cloud. Not very far beneath now was the green pelt of the forest, broken here and there as if by some dreadful disease by sprawling yellow scabs of swamp. A great brown river, which I think must have been the Pardo, lay across the earth like an uncoiled snake, wandering away to the uttermost horizon, where sky and earth became one. I began to understand why the pilot was changing direction so frequently, veering this way and that; where the quilted cloud sagged low it had burst; a series of localised rainstorms was travelling slowly across the earth like curtains dragged by the hand of God, each lit by a blade of sunlight, for where the clouds broke they also let in light. There were some half-dozen of these Wagnerian convulsions, all moving towards us, or so it

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seemed. We continued to swing hither and thither, losing height all the time, till we hit one.

The plane reared, shivered, and dropped. I caught a glimpse of Sebastian's face, now a refined shade of mauve, as he called: 'Do not disturb, gentlemen!'

We clung to our jolting seats. The plane twisted and jerked and lashed its tail like a captive alligator. There was nothing to see now beyond the window; the rain was almost solid, opaque; there was a yard or two of dented wing from which the water cascaded, and then a grey bank; a faint blue light glowed on the quivering metal, which I suppose was electricity. Then a few yards beneath us I saw the tree-tops of the forest and I remember thinking, 'Christ, this is it,' as they sped beneath us.

It was frightfully hot in the cabin. The cardinal whose profile I could see against the dim light of the window beyond his head, was running his beads through his fingers, his eyes closed; sweat coursed down his old, gentle face. The boy with thin black hair had his fists clenched and seemed to be talking to himself, though nothing was audible above the roar of the engines. The tree tops were just below and I saw an area of swamp flash past and then trees again. Mr. Soong was lying back in his seat, his eyes half-closed, his yellow plump face moist with the heat. I remember wondering where my suitcase was—in which part of the plane it might be. It is curious how one worries about one's baggage in moments of danger; the mortal peril through which I have seen soldiers go to preserve their personal kit, valueless though it usually is, is something to marvel

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at; men seem to prefer to die with their belongings about them, unanxious at least on this score.

How long we endured that rigid misery I have no recollection: probably for no longer than a few minutes. I remember that of a sudden the earth was bathed in yellow evening sunlight and the plane was steady and we were climbing. The co-pilot went down the aisle with a pale grin.

Sebastian said: 'All over now, just a little storm. Big storms in Brazil.'

Mr. Soong said: 'Thank you, *comissario*,' very gravely.

'I am a good guide,' Sebastian said.

'A treasure,' said Mr. Soong.

We landed at Campo Grande twenty minutes later. The airstrip was like a lake and the air was cool and sweet. In the airport there was a deputation of priests to meet the cardinal, who was in no mood for deputations. Mr. Soong and Sebastian splashed away up the track in an old shooting-brake. While I awaited my turn for a seat in one of the ramshackle vehicles I wandered outside.

This, then, was Mato Grosso. I had read about this place from time to time since boyhood; some of the books I had read, I know now, contain a great deal of lurid nonsense on the subject; more often than not Mato Grosso is represented as a ghastly hell of jungle, disease, heat, savages with an appetite for human flesh, and the like. Much of it is no doubt true enough; so many explorers cannot be wrong, unless perchance there is an understanding among explorers that they shall not let



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one another down by describing it otherwise. My own unimportant journey had no pretences to exploration; nor did I hanker after eminence by getting lost. I wanted to see something other than the jungle; I hoped for something new, an aspect of Mato Grosso that had perhaps escaped notice. I was fortunate enough to find it: for me it was more exciting than all the jungles of Amazonas.

THE car bounced along the track into Campo Grande. I asked the driver if there were a hotel or boarding-house or place where I could get a room. Oh, yes, he assured me, there was a hotel. 'Very excellent, *senhor*. Oh, yes. First-class comfort. Very modern.'

We pulled up outside it and a mestizo boy came out and took my baggage.

I have slept in one or two unsavoury places on occasion, but none of them could compare with the room in which I spent four nights in Campo Grande. It was small and very dark, in the basement; its single window was high up on a level with the hotel's backyard, in which I could see variously a midden, two or three heaps of rotting garbage, a mangy dog and a number of elderly hens; there was an anti-mosquito grill across the broken glass of the window, which effectively shut out the dim light but which, since it contained a large hole exactly at ground level, permitted not merely the entry of mosquitoes but of various backyard fauna as well. The heat was frightful, yet water streamed down the walls, which themselves were somewhat the colour of gorgonzola; veins of green mould ran from ceiling to floor. The bed was an iron frame bearing a straw mattress and pillow.

It was the smell, however, the moist foetid stench of the place, that truly repelled. I recoiled, half a hundred

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cockroaches scuttled into the shadows and I said: 'No,' as much out of unbelief that such a hole existed as from refusal to inhabit it. 'Never.'

The mestizo boy shrugged. 'Very modern,' he said.

I pleaded with the manager, but in vain. The other rooms were all the same, he said, and in any case were occupied. He was rather hurt.

I did not encounter the hotel spider till the following day when I attempted to take a shower. I was standing under the cataract of warm discoloured water in that horrible little dungeon when I became aware of being watched. It was on the floor a few feet away tinkering with its maw, eyeing me malevolently; it was grey-black in colour; its body was about the size of a child's fist, and it was abominably, moistly hairy. I have never felt so naked. When I tentatively moved, it moved also, a twitch this way or that, as if simply to indicate that it was ready to forestall any action I might take. We continued with this absorbing game for several minutes. There was nothing to stand on, no way out but by the door, nothing to do finally but fling a tablet of soap at it, which by chance hit the target, and bolt.

I took no more showers and came to the conclusion, which I never saw any reason to modify later, that by comparison with these evil things, snakes are quite companionable creatures anxious only to be left alone to pursue an open-air life in peace.

There was no sleep that night. I should have gone out and bought a mosquito net, but I forgot; each morning I swore that day I would buy a mosquito net, and every evening I had forgotten. Heavily drugged

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with Paludrin and *pinga* I lay in a lather of DDT, Repellex and sweat and slapped at mosquitoes, striking a match from time to time to light a cigarette and send the legions of cockroaches scuttling for the shadows.

Now, the traveller of urban character becomes aware of a curious *malaise* a day or two after he has arrived in Campo Grande, as if at some time in the remote past he had had a dream, not altogether distressing, whose scene had been this one, or one very like it. For two days I tried to identify this familiarity.

Here is a rough red road which, beginning as a dusty track on the edge of the *serra*, broadens to embrace a crude little town and its hatful of inhabitants, and disappears again a few hundred yards farther on into the limitless wilderness of the Central Plateau — a benign wilderness on the whole, technically described as ‘tall grass savanna’; the greater part of Mato Grosso is either savanna or semi-deciduous lowland; the dense forests for which Mato Grosso is noted lie in the far north of that state and are more typical of Amazonas than Mato Grosso. For what statistics are worth, the Central Plateau is about a dozen times the size of England. This type of country, which has the immeasurable advantage of a few hundred feet of altitude, is locally called *serra*, in Portuguese. Campo Grande lies on the edge of the *serra*.

Everything there is to see in the town you can see more or less at a glance, and what is not visible is sensible, even to the undertone of violence that is part of the character of the place. The main street is flanked by two rows of stores, some of cheap white stone, some of timber.

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Brightly striped hammocks, for sale, hang in the doorways of the shops, and cheap white trousers of drill, and snake boots. There are two or three saloons, a church, a bank. Overhead a sparse tracery of telegraph wires lopes from pole to pole aslant the blinding white sky. There is little else. The side roads do not go far; they end as the main street ends, trailing away into the low vegetation of the *serra*.

I leaned against a wall in the shade and watched. A few women went from shop to shop; none of them was old; there were old men, but no old women. Two pretty Brazilian girls went past beneath coloured parasols, wagging their buttocks as Brazilian girls always do, carrying themselves well, wearing their cheap cotton dresses with a natural *chic*, so much so that they looked slightly out of place. Outside the saloons there were a number of men who appeared to be idlers but who were in fact cattle-dealers whose places of business were this saloon or that one, this street corner or the other, from nine till twelve noon; others were inside, in the shade, sipping *maté* and discussing the day's price of steers, or how poor Pedro was ambushed and killed by a charge of buckshot last night. Those whose business appeared to be of the solid kind, the clerks and shop-keepers, accountants and farmers, were nearly all Brazilians; some few of the other variety, too — the diamond diggers, the old men who panned the streams of the *serra* for gold, the speculators, were also Brazilian; most of these, however, were of European extraction. A couple of *campeiros* (cow hands) rode slowly past the trucks and jeeps drawn up outside the post office, their horses' tails swinging at the

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flies, their shirts sweaty, their wide straw hats frayed, their sheepskin saddles matted and threadbare with use. They wore heavy cartridge belts, but the holsters were empty.

Campo Grande is called a frontier town, and it has the raw, uneasy, violent character of a frontier town, but in fact it adjoins no international boundary, it abuts only on what is called semi-tame country. It is one of a series of minor halts which punctuate the lonely railroad running from the Atlantic coast across southern Mato Grosso to the Bolivian frontier. North and south of the railway, on the *serra*, there are a few settlements, but not many; crossing the plateau to the north you come to the sources of the Xingu and jungle; this is the country in which Colonel Fawcett disappeared, and others before and after him; indeed the opportunities this territory offers of dying obscurely and hideously seem to have attracted very nearly as many people as they have repelled. The privacy of the Indian tribes continues to be a source of irritation to all manner of explorers who, in their urge toward heroic self-destruction, or their desire to be the first to acquaint the Indians with the delights of civilisation, continue to perish ingloriously in the cooking pot. The Indians, as a matter of fact, have already had some experience of the white man, who slaughtered their grandfathers in tens of thousands and enslaved the rest. The present generation is therefore a little hostile; that the Indians are slowly being won over, as they are, is due mainly to the policy of General Rondon of the Indian Protection Service, himself half Indian and a brave and enlightened man, whose patrols operate under the order: 'Die, if you must, but never kill.'

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A hundred miles west of Campo Grande, beyond the *serra*, lies the great swamp known locally as the Pantanal, many thousands of square miles in area and one of the unhealthiest places in the world, the breeding ground of snake and jaguar, mosquito and *piranha*; Corumbá sits roughly in the centre of this area, on the Paraguay River. On the other bank of the Paraguay is the Gran Chaco and Bolivia. Once a year, in the rainy season, the head-waters of the Paraguay rise and flood the swamps to a depth of several feet: as the waters subside the gross vegetation is liberally invested with dying fish; a week later every thicket is embroidered with the skeletons of millions of *piranha*, like scraps of white lace, till the rains fall again and the river rises and newer, fresher dregs lie rotting in the heat, causing incidentally what Neilson, an old North American cattle man I met in Campo Grande, described as 'the biggest goddamnedest stink you ever smelled.'

It is in towns like Campo Grande that the future of Brazil lies, however. The development of the coastal belt and its cities has outstripped the development of the interior to an astonishing extent. Brazilian economy leaps from boom to boom — rubber, cotton, coffee — each of which appears to turn up in the nick of time, just preventing the plunge into bankruptcy and chaos which is always between. Rio and São Paulo ring with the construction of sky-scrapers, and a few hundred miles inland there are no roads. A drop in the market value of coffee or cotton would bring the whole edifice toppling down in a night. Yet the development of the natural wealth of Brazil, which lies in places like Campo

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Grande, is left to a handful of adventurers. This in itself is not altogether a bad thing. The civil servant is not by nature a pioneer with a gun in one hand and a spade in the other; his contribution consists in corruption and a book of stifling by-laws. The man best equipped to take on such a job is the man who has no roots elsewhere, of which there are two kinds: the first is the roughneck, out to get rich quick; the second is his follower, who builds and plants. Both are to be found in Campo Grande, and all that goes with them.

Neilson was a shrunk, yellow-faced old man with a lean jaw and failure in his eyes. He leaned against the wall in front of the saloon and stared absently across the glare of the street, waiting for business. All his life, I was told, Neilson had been trying to sell steers when the demand was for cows and cows when the dealers had money for nothing but steers. He had a chronic stomach disorder, not perhaps unconnected with his gnawing, tormented hatred of his own bad luck. 'Some kind o' bug,' he said vaguely, 'some kind o' local bug. . . .'

We went into the saloon and ordered *maté*. He was a kindly man, as garrulous as old pioneers usually are. I had asked him how to get out to Ruana, one of the cattle *fazendas* on the *serra*. A lanky, fair-haired boy passed in the street and called a greeting and the old man's eyes lit up and he waved.

'That's my boy,' he said. 'He's a pilot, works for the local air-taxi company. He'll fly you out, if you want.'

'Does he like being a pilot?'

'Well, there's some future in it. Not much use in being



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a cattle man, except maybe in a big way. Not till there's roads and railways. Know how long it takes to move a few head o' cattle down the line to the fattening camps? Sixty days. Sixty days, travelling overland.' He stared across the street, sipping his glass of *maté*. 'My boy will take you out to Ruana, if you want to go. Not today, though. Sunday today. Go by road if you want. Not much of a road, just a track through the woods, cost you a heap o' money; drivers'll tell you it knocks their automobiles to hell.'

There were four taxis in the town, all more or less ready for scrapping. There was also the air-taxi service, quite a common thing even in the smallest of the towns of Mato Grosso; every *fazenda* has its own little airstrip.

I asked: 'Who shot Pedro?'

He shrugged. 'Might have been any of half a dozen. One of the professionals, maybe.'

'Professionals?'

'Round here you hire somebody to do your killing. One happened a week or two back, saw it myself. Feller rides up the street, comes into the saloon, says to a man at the bar, "Is your name Axel?" Axel was his name, German, farmer in a small way. "Is your name Axel?" The man says it is and the feller pulls out a gun, shoots him dead, walks out and gets on his horse and rides out o' town.'

'Did nobody stop him?'

'Who's going to stop him?'

I suggested: the police.

'Weren't any police around. Nobody else did. You try to stay out of other people's quarrels here.'

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'Didn't the police go after him?'

'Where? The feller's got thousands of square miles to hide up in. Aren't more than a handful of cops in the whole territory. A while later the feller comes back. People forget. Got more important things to do. Maybe there's been two or three other killings since then.'

'Is he back, the man who shot Axel?'

'I haven't seen him. He'll be back.'

'What do his relatives do about it?'

'They can pay the police, that's about all.' He explained that the police, here as elsewhere in the remoter parts of Mato Grosso, operate somewhat in the manner of mercenaries and are for private hire. If, however, the police are hired in this way the killer is apt to take it in poor part and shoot the hirer, so that he may no longer be troubled by the police.

I was a little incredulous. 'How often does this happen?'

'Hard to say. Two or three at once, then it'll be quiet for a while. Runs in cycles. Doesn't often happen here in town, of course. Mostly they do their killing out of town at night. *Tocaya* . . . ambush. Lie up and shoot in the back.'

I suspected the old man of exaggeration; people living in odd places are apt to spin tales to strangers about this or that dramatic aspect of local life. Until one is brought face to face with it, it is difficult to realise that life can be very much cheaper in one place than one has been brought up in another to believe it should be.

'What's at the root of it all?' I asked.

'Roots? There aren't any roots, not here, not yet.'

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‘Why is there so much murder?’

He shrugged again. ‘Too many wild men and too many guns and not enough law,’ he said. ‘Most of these fellers carry a gun of some kind. Not supposed to in town, so you don’t see too many. But out o’ town — all the time. They carry guns against snakes, they say. Sticks are more use against snakes and everybody knows it. Just the same, everybody totes a gun. One feller carries a gun, so the rest have to, in self defence. They’re bound to go off some time. Somebody gets a little drunk, quarrels over some woman, a cattle deal maybe. . . .’ He sipped his *maté*. ‘It’s a rough country.’ He watched an old man cross the street. ‘See that feller?’

The man was shambling along in the shade of the stores. He wore a wide-brimmed straw hat with a low crown and had a straggling grey moustache.

‘Feller by the name of Garcias,’ Neilson said. ‘Garcias. Claims to have killed twenty-two men. Works for the police now and then. Twenty-two. Knock off a few to allow for professional pride, call it a dozen, and you’re not far out.’ Garcias ambled away down the road, his arms loose at his sides.

The street was quite still in the midday heat, raw and harsh and unfinished in the glare. It was as I crossed the road that it all slipped into focus and I knew what it was about Campo Grande that was familiar. Thereafter whenever I walked in that street I half expected to be brought up by an angry shout:

‘Where in hell do you think you’re going?’

A good question.

‘For God’s sake, how many times do I have to tell

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you people to keep your friends off the floor while shooting is in progress?’

‘So sorry.’

‘Will somebody get that idiot out of here so we can get on with this scene?’

Now I confess that one of my favourite forms of relaxation is to sit in a cinema and watch the familiar unfolding of ‘a Western.’ Westerns, by the way, are surely so much a part of minstrelsy that one may omit the self-conscious quotes. Of Westerns, then, with the modest stipulation that they shall be well acted, one may be quite uncritical. Of all other kinds of film, criticism is permissible and pitiless, but if you enjoy a Western you must leave your mind behind and take instead a toffee-apple and accept what comes without regard for probability, aesthetic values or artistic merit: you are watching a ballad, not a contemporary work of art. For my own part I revel in good horsemanship, in the whine of ricochets and the whoop of Indians. I rejoice in the sheriff’s posse, and Geronimo at bay is no less dear to my heart now than Isoulte was, tied naked to a tree, twenty-five years ago.

To turn a corner and find oneself suddenly among it all, however, is very confusing. At first you are inclined not to take it very seriously; these childish people, you think, are all play-acting; it’s high time they pulled down those back-drops and put away their props and got down to a bit of serious living. They have it all wrong in any case — the place is littered with anachronisms and prolepses whichever way you look at it; it is neither 1953 nor 1853.

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There is the point, of course. You are reminded of the beloved ballad because there are similarities. But they are only superficial; Campo Grande is itself alone. The horseman with the gun on his hip belongs here; the Buick taxi drawn up outside the saloon is not a regrettable lapse on the part of the technician who built the set; it, too, belongs here. The men and women who live in Campo Grande — almost anywhere in central Brazil — have other things to think of; they have taken whatever seems useful from the rest of the world, of whatever period, in order to solve their problems, but no more; everything which does not contribute toward the solution is left outside. There is no history in Mato Grosso; it has none of its own and nobody else's is relevant. What is most surprising is the ease with which the civilised refugee, the immigrant from Europe, can throw off the clouds of history and culture he trails behind him. In this soil these things do not survive long, because they are a nuisance. Culture begins and ends in that suffocating little cinema off the main street; the law consists in what is expedient; tradition is a burden; history lies in the future — in the mastery of the Big Field, the infinite wilderness that begins a couple of hundred yards up the road. In this conception the influence exerted by the rest of the civilised world is mischievous and befogging; the pressure is felt, certainly, but it brings only diffusion of effort, the desire to emulate, to run before walking, to build sky-scrapers and forget the roads. The value set upon human life has always been a pretty fair indication of the real degree of civilisation reached by any particular people; in Campo

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Grande there is the Buick taxi, and there are radios and refrigerators; but they also kill one another quite often. In Rio they do it with a large, glistening motor car.

Nevertheless, out of this hotch-potch a country and a people are growing. The eighteen men of the fortress did not die because their rulers had betrayed the past, but because they were betraying the future — not a history but an idea.

In the state of Mato Grosso two Englishmen live; I had an introduction to one of them. Jock Mackenzie, a cattle man whom I had met in São Paulo, who was then hobbling about, having been kicked twice in the same place by a steer, said: 'If you want to know about cattle go and stay with Don Ricardo.'

To arrive on a stranger's doorstep with a suitcase seemed presumptive, but I gathered it was quite customary; in a remote place a newcomer is more than welcome.

'Everybody knows Don Ricardo in Mato Grosso,' Jock Mackenzie said. He was very nearly right; everybody knew him but the man I asked. He was a Frenchman by extraction named Reval, and he travelled in pharmaceutical supplies.

'Allo!' he exclaimed, and seated himself at my table. I am tempted to think that the only people in the world with any respect for another man's solitude are the English, who have too much. Still, I was glad of his company. He was short and very neat; he gave off an aura of busy-ness and bustle. It was exceedingly hot in the gloomy little dining-room, the food was abominable,

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the *farinha* sourly familiar; huge moths beat their wings against the lamp-shades, setting up a faint metallic resonance, and hundreds of insects crawled laboriously about the dingy table-cloth.

‘All alone?’

In the space of five minutes he had poured out a fund of information about himself and his activities, all of which would have been entirely commonplace but for the setting in which they were staged. He had a wife, he told me, five children and a mistress in São Paulo, he covered approximately five thousand miles a week, and found the business of selling supplies to pharmacies a very profitable one indeed. Wherever there was a chemist’s shop in Brazil, there, too, sooner or later, came M. Reval with his case of samples and his umbrella — Roberto, as he told me he was familiarly called by his clients. He saw nothing odd or quixotic in himself; the picture he drew of a small, dapper man in a double-breasted suit and black hat plunging through the swamps on muleback or by canoe to collect an order for half a dozen toothbrushes struck him as in no way unusual.

He had, moreover, an inexhaustible fund of confidential advice, all of which was at my disposal.

‘I wouldn’t tell people you’re a writer, old man.’

I told him I didn’t, habitually. ‘Why not?’

‘There are too many rascals about, my dear fellow, too many rascals. *Malins, vous savez — malins.*’ He dropped his voice. ‘I’m afraid they’d take advantage.’

I had not been aware that writers as a whole were more gullible or defenceless than people of other trades. ‘You asked me what my work was.’

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'Yes, but me you can trust. Some of these gentry —' He waved a hand at the motley folk eating rice and beans at the other tables. 'They'd want to show you round.'

'I'd be very grateful.'

He sighed. 'You artists. . . .' He shook his head. 'No, no, no, no. It's dangerous, very dangerous. A knock on the head, a knife. . . .'

'You can collect one of those in Rio, or for that matter in London.'

'Altogether different,' he exclaimed. 'Not the same thing at all!'

'What's the difference?'

'Well. Well, in Rio there are hospitals. Really you ought not to be alone.' He was clearly deeply troubled on my behalf. 'Heaven knows what is going to happen to you.' It depressed him throughout the meal.

He collected his hat and umbrella and we went out to find a bar and a cold drink. The night was warm and velvety. Campo Grande had turned out in a body for the usual evening promenade in the light of the store windows, till the cinema should open; they sauntered to and fro up and down the street. But not so, Roberto. He set off at a spanking pace, using his umbrella somewhat in the manner of a snow-plough, to cleave a path through the crowd. I was content to move at the local snail's pace, since it was very hot; every now and then M. Reval was compelled to halt and wait for me, which he did with impatience.

'You go very fast,' I explained.

'I cover five thousand miles a week,' he said. And off he scampered again.



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But then I noticed he was greeting nearly everybody we passed, moreover greeting them by name, and as often as not shaking hands with them.

‘Who was that?’ I asked once, by way of a test.

‘That? Oh, that was Senhor ——.’ And he mentioned a name I have forgotten. ‘Would you like to be introduced?’ Without waiting for assent or declension, he turned about and hastened after the quarry. I set off after him: ‘No, no, not now. . . .’

Reluctantly he abandoned the pursuit and we resumed the march. ‘You have a great many friends,’ I ventured, sweating copiously.

‘Three thousand two hundred and twenty,’ he said, nodding.

I was stunned.

‘Last year I counted them.’

He waved to somebody and called a greeting. ‘I know them all by name,’ he went on blithely. ‘I never forget a name.’ He shook hands with somebody. ‘Three thousand two hundred and twenty, all over Brazil. In Belém, Manáus, Cuiabá, São Paulo, Rio, Santos, Belo Horizonte. . . .’ He passed out of earshot.

We sat in a bar and M. Reval fidgeted and drummed on the table and we watched the ebb and flow of people in the street, up and down.

‘Do you happen to know Don Ricardo?’ I asked him presently; if this man did not, then nobody did.

But apparently he did not: had I an address? I had the address of Don Ricardo’s office in Campo Grande. M. Reval glanced at it and said: ‘Good. Let us go and find it.’

We set off again.

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I am thankful to say we did not find Don Ricardo that night, nor even his office. We carried out, at M. Reval's delighted instigation, a door-to-door check which produced some fascinating results, but no Don Ricardo. We found several stout, coffee-coloured women with whom M. Reval shook hands warmly, but that was all. I excused myself shortly afterwards, finding the stress of M. Reval's companionship too severe for the climate and time of night, made what I fear was a poor excuse, and went back to the bar, where I found Neilson sipping *maté*.

But I had forgotten how small a place Campo Grande was. Three minutes later exactly M. Reval came bustling in.

'*Olé*,' he exclaimed. 'All by yourselves?'

After a while Neilson, staring across the dark street, said gloomily: 'There was a feller shot in here a couple of weeks ago.'

'What name?' M. Reval enquired.

Neilson told him. 'Axel.'

M. Reval sighed and wagged his head. 'I knew him well.'

'Three thousand two hundred and nineteen?' I suggested.

For a moment he was astonished. But then he patted my arm and said: 'And one makes twenty,' and laughed till he cried.

The stars were strange and bright.

VERY early on the following morning — I was loath to stay in that horrible death-chamber of mine a moment longer than was necessary — I dosed myself with Paludrin, ate a revolting breakfast, and went out into the sun. Approaching the first of the three or four taxis parked in the main street I asked the driver how much he wanted to drive me to Ruana, Don Ricardo's *fazenda*, which lay forty-odd miles out on the serra.

I was very curious to meet Don Ricardo. He was by far the largest cattle-breeder and dealer in southern Mato Grosso; Ruana itself, I had been told, was as big in acreage as the King Ranch of Texas, and there was an extraordinary unanimity of opinion about Ricardo himself: I never heard him spoken of except with respect and liking. I wanted to know what manner of Englishman it was who had elected to live solitarily in this wilderness, who moreover had earned the lasting esteem of these hard-headed people who habitually pulled down their idols as soon as they had set them up.

'Ruana?' the driver said affably. 'One thousand *cruzeiros*.'

'Seven hundred,' I said.

'One thousand,' he repeated, smiling.

Foreseeing a lengthy discussion we went into a bar and ordered coffee. In Brazil you fill your cup with two-thirds of sugar to one-third of coffee; it is rather like

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treacle to drink, but excellent when you are accustomed to it, and a powerful stimulant.

'Eight hundred,' I said.

'Nine-fifty.'

He was a mestizo, brown-skinned, with high cheek-bones, black eyes and a cheerfully corrupt grin.

'It's outrageous — I won't pay it.'

'You could fly,' he suggested, knowing very well that the cost of the same journey by air taxi would be fifteen hundred *cruzeiros* or more, the equivalent of fifteen pounds sterling.

'Eight-fifty,' I said. 'Not a cent more.'

'But my car, *senhor* . . . the condition of the road.'

'What's the matter with the road?' I could see what was the matter with the car from where we stood. It was a dilapidated Chrysler of great age, having a certain rococo majesty but, one would have said, very little longer to reign.

'The road! The road, *senhor*, is not a road. The road is a track — a mere track, *senhor cabalheiro*. And it has been raining.' This was true enough. It had stopped now and the sun beat down and the earth exuded a heavy aromatic steam. 'Ah no, *senhor*, think what it will do to my car.'

We paused. 'Another coffee?' I suggested.

'Permit me, *senhor*, you are a visitor to my country. He ordered two more cups of coffee. 'You like Brazil?'

'I like everything about Brazil.'

'The cost of living is high.'

'Nine hundred.'

'Nine-fifty.' He smiled.

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I gave in. Naturally enough he had no change when we reached Ruana, and nor had I, so he won outright. The traveller in another land is fair game, and if he cannot occasionally lose without bitterness, he had much better not travel; in any event, I liked the Brazilians too well to nurse resentment, then or ever.

The last dwellings fell away behind; we splashed along a rutted track in the sun, and the faded dolls with which Oswaldo — such was the driver's name — had improved the interior of his car danced frantically. We forded a seething brown torrent in which a truck had recently come to grief and was wheel-deep in the middle, and slithered up the slope on the opposite bank. The ground rose gradually; the track narrowed and the woods closed their ranks. We went on through the woods for nearly an hour. Once as we ground along the edge of a clearing I saw a big bird of some kind in a tree and I asked Oswaldo what it was. 'That's a snake-eater,' he said. 'You don't see them very often.' He stared at the eagle. 'I think he is about to make a kill. Shall I stop?'

He drew up out of sight of the eagle and I went back quietly. It sat perfectly still on the branch and seemed to be watching something on the ground below it. I waited several minutes: the bird did not move. Then suddenly he took off, dropped. I saw the wings above the grasses; there was no sound. He rose almost at once with a snake in his talons, neatly gripped behind the head, and resumed his place in the tree. The beak struck twice and presently the snake ceased to writhe and twist and hung limp. When I stepped from behind the undergrowth and he saw me, he stared for a moment, then

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lifted his wings and took off, the snake trailing from his talon. He disappeared over the trees.

For two hours more we lurched along the track. Oswaldo talked about his wife and seven children. His father had come to Mato Grosso thirty years before, in one of the diamond or gold rushes which depopulated the coastal belt from time to time. He had made a small fortune, and had lost it. Oswaldo had bought his taxi with what remained. Which kinds of blood they were that flowed through Oswaldo's veins I have no idea; nor, probably, had he; originally it must have been either mestizo, which is Portuguese and Indian, mulatto, Portuguese and Negro, or *cafuso*, Indian and Negro; since then, however, people of nearly every other race in the world have settled and intermarried in Brazil and there is no such exactness of definition; the white races on the whole have balked at intermarriage in Brazil, but the other half, of which Oswaldo was one, have married freely with little or no awareness of colour or blood; they count themselves Brazilians, a brown race.

The woods grew thin. The atmosphere was less humid already, for though the Central Plateau stands no higher than a few hundred feet above the rest of Brazil, it is too high for the dense forests and steamy air of the lowlands. The sun was hot but the air was cool and sweet. Presently the woods fell away altogether and we came out on to the *serra*.

'Ruana,' Oswaldo announced, 'begins here.'

I was in love with that country from that moment onwards. A wide shallow valley stretched away to the horizon, magnificent in its great spaces and loneliness.

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The grasses were coarse and waist-high, but green, deep green, and the wind moved across them like a hand stroking a flowing pelt; groups of low trees grew about the banks of the river in the floor of the valley and many small rivulets ran down the long slopes toward the river. It was a beautiful place, like a promised land.

‘Where is the ranch-house?’

‘Further yet, over the horizon.’ He smiled. ‘Plenty of space, no?’

‘It’s magnificent.’

He was very pleased. Half an hour later the white walls of a building shone among the trees far over on the other side of the valley.

There were three men sitting on the verandah. The first was a big-boned young man with blue eyes and tawny hair that fell across his forehead; boyhood still clung to him and probably always would. The second was of delicate build, rather sallow, with features that seemed to have been drawn on his face in pen and ink, black and infinitely fine; he had his back to me as I went up the steps and I saw the round, almost bald head, the narrow shoulders and, at his hip, a gigantic revolver and a knife in a stained leather sheath. Richard told me later that this man, whose name was Hermenigildo, was in fact anything but delicate; he was a *comissario*, leader of a team of professional overland cattle-drivers.

The third was Richard himself. I had expected a burly man, with perhaps a booming voice and a rough, bluff way with him. Not at all: Don Ricardo was lightly built, neat and compact, with blue eyes and a

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pleasant Irish accent and a habit of stumbling over his words as if a little embarrassed. It was a mannerism: nothing dismayed Richard. The sudden appearance of a stray Englishman in that distant place caused him nothing more than a split-second's stupefaction. He asked me what I would have to drink. 'I'll tell somebody to get your traps out of that car you came in — you'll stay a few days, of course.'

I said I would like to stay very much indeed, but that I had failed to bring my traps with me. He promised to pick up my suitcase the next day, when he would be going into Campo Grande on business. The *comissario* decided to take advantage of the car returning empty to town, shook hands with a delicate, sinister smile, and left. Ricardo told me later he had been expecting trouble with the *comissario*, which happily had not materialised, over a recently completed cattle drive; he himself was conspicuously unarmed and, as I came to know, was the only cattle-breeder in the territory who regularly went into Campo Grande without a weapon of any description. He shrugged: 'If you carry a gun, people think you're afraid of somebody.'

I asked him if he had no enemies.

'There are one or two who would like to see me dead, I dare say. They're in prison just now. Nothing very serious — bit of rustling.'

'Is there much of it?'

'Not much. One of my boys made off with a dozen or so head a couple of months ago, but they're branded and the man he tried to sell them to knew the mark and wouldn't touch them. Then they're difficult things to hide,



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white cattle, in this country. We lose a cow now and then, when somebody wants a side or two of beef for his family. That's almost impossible to track down. They eat the meat and bury the hide.'

A Negro stood at the foot of the verandah steps. He was a fine old fellow, tall and thin, with white hair and a smile of great sweetness.

'Taitt wants to meet you,' Ricardo said. He dropped his voice. 'Taitt likes to be in the know — don't let him talk too long.' He called: 'Come along, Taitt!'

Taitt shambled up the steps grinning broadly and shook hands. 'Taitt's a British subject, too,' Ricardo said.

The old man laughed with delight. 'Yassa, I'm from Trinidad. I'm a British subject all right. Trinidad. You ever been to Trinidad, mass'?''

I said no, I hadn't.

'I've been to England, sah. Oh yassa, many's the time. Liverpool, I know Liverpool. From Liverpool there's a train leaves the station there at six thirty-five and gits you into London at ten-thirty sharp. Very fine train. A fine train that one, sah. Yassa,' he went on breathlessly, 'I know Newcastle, yassa, and Glasgow and Edinburgh. There's a train leaves Newcastle at nine forty-five in the morning and gits you to Glasgow around four in the afternoon. A very good train that one, too, sah. Yassa, there's some fine trains in England, sah, fine trains. My word.'

The position of the Negro in Brazil is an unusual one. The Brazilians are fond of saying that in Brazil there is no colour bar whatever; certainly the man standing next to you in a bar or tram or signing in at a hotel is just as

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likely to be black as white and his rights are equal to the white man's. Nevertheless he is undoubtedly the lowest of the racial groups socially — because intellectually he does not appear to be the equal of the half-breed or white man. On the hills behind Rio there are Negro shanty towns which would disgrace any city and they are dangerous places to roam about in. Dom Pedro II, the wisest and most enlightened ruler Brazil ever had or is likely to have, brought Negro slavery in Brazil to an end in 1888 — the main reason, incidentally, for his enforced abdication a year or two later; he died in a third-class hotel in Paris. It is thanks to him, at all events, that the Negro in Brazil is freer than in any other country in the world. It is entirely typical of their status that Taitt, for instance, should stroll round to the front of the house as soon as he heard of the arrival of a stranger, there to wait with a smile till he should be invited on to the verandah where he shook hands and chatted for a little while. It was also typical of Richard and of Ruana.

Taitt himself was oblivious to such matters. I have never encountered a man more delighted by the simple things of life than Taitt. He laughed all the time, as he talked, laughing to signify pleasure rather than amusement. I was a new God-sent victim and every morning, when he had saddled the horses and brought them up to the ranch house, he would wait for me, for another spirited enquiry into the time-tables of the world's railways, which had an extraordinary fascination for him, or for another chat about Trinidad, or to tell me of the haphazard way in which in his old age he had fetched up at Ruana where Don Ricardo let him potter about

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and lord it over the domestic staff, who paid not the slightest attention, and about the fearful trouble he had had with women.

'Two fortunes, sah, two fortunes, and they took it all from me, every penny.' He laughed and laughed, and set the folly of man to music.

Johan, the loose-limbed, tawny young man I had met on the verandah, had been born in Indonesia of Dutch parents. At the age of sixteen he had taken a lively, and evidently sanguinary part in the civil war that followed the liberation of the islands. He had returned to Holland, found it not at all to a taste that ran to wide skies and freedom, and had drifted out to Brazil to stay with some relatives. Now he was one of Don Ricardo's two assistants; the other, a Frenchman named, I believe, Dupont, was away on leave and I never saw him.

Ruana was not Richard's own; he managed it for an Anglo-Brazilian meat company. I was, and remain, astonished that he was able to direct and run the buying and breeding, branding and rearing, improving and eventual dispatch to the fattening camps of many thousands of head of Zebu each year, moreover arranging 'burns' across the huge spaces of Ruana, keeping his own accounts, controlling personally every detail of a vast, complicated organisation, all with no more than two assistants and a handful of Brazilian *campeiros*. Do not imagine that Ruana was a gracious Hispanic mansion in whose *patio* there were weekly *fiestas* where several hundred vividly dressed gauchos and girls danced hotly to the music of guitars. Ruana was a lonely, hard-working place, silent for the most part. There was Richard, Johan and I, no others.

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In the outbuildings and near the corrals there lived a few *campeiros*: I never saw more than four or five at one time. And there were three or four domestic servants in the low, dark house itself. But it was a good place to be.

Johan asked nothing more than to spend the rest of his life in Mato Grosso, which he loved with an abiding joy. I never wholly understood the nature of his job; it embraced a great deal. He was responsible for surveying the lines and fences, which he toured at intervals, repairing damage. He also operated as a kind of one-man patrol of the territory, keeping an eye on the stock as it wandered over the *serra*, always on the look-out for rustling and the depredations of wild animals, snake-bite, the attacks of eagles on the calves. While on these long, solitary treks he would live on the game he was able to shoot, slinging his hammock at night between a couple of trees, with no other company than his horse and such wild creatures as were curious enough to investigate his little camp.

'One time,' he told me in his thick, broken English, 'I was woken in the morning by something rubbing against my behind where the hammock sagged in the middle. I looked over the edge and there was a family of *peccari* [wild boar] scratching their backs against my bottom.'

I asked: 'What did you do?'

He showed his big white teeth. 'Nothing. Stay where I am. I'd left my rifle in the tree hanging from a branch — that was one lesson. And I'd slung my hammock too low — that was another. So I have a good long sleep that morning, till they'd gone away.'

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He warmly advised me to take to a tree if ever I ran across *peccari*. They live usually in tribes of fifty or more. In such numbers they will attack practically anything, ripping it to shreds with their ferocious tusks; they have an odd manner of gnashing their teeth as they forage for food, and particularly when they fan out and charge; this queer harsh clashing of teeth, which sounds something like the march of many people across a pebble beach, is audible a long way away and sends every other animal in the vicinity, not excluding the *onça* (or jaguar) scuttling for cover. But even a tree stump was good enough, Johan said, since the boar cannot raise his head high enough to trouble anything two or three feet above the ground, and cannot climb at all. I saw small families at fairly close quarters, but they ambled away and I had no occasion to take to my heels, which was just as well, as I recall, since there were no trees within a thousand yards.

Johan loved hunting and was a wonderful shot; I saw him bring down a deer running across our front at a range of something over four hundred metres. He never killed, however, except for a sound reason, such as the victim's fondness for cattle, or when we needed something with which to vary the household diet of Zebu beef; on hunting trips we carried strips of dried meat irreverently known locally as *Maria seca* — 'dried Mary.' But Johan knew the spoor and habits of every animal on the *serra* and he would explain them as we went along. I saw a good many of them at one time or another: tapir, ema, which is a small ostrich, boar, deer, ant-eater, wolf and *jaguaririca* (a tiger-cat from whose name the

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English word jaguar derives, used quite erroneously to describe the whole breed of Brazilian cats). The jaguar is only one of the *onça* family, of which there are four or five distinct species increasing in size to the *onça pintado* or marsh jaguar, found in the swamps of the Pantanal but which, when the Paraguay is in flood, migrates a few miles to higher ground.

The *onça pintado*, as a matter of interest, weighs between three and four hundred pounds when fully grown, roughly the weight of a medium-sized tiger, and is scarcely less dangerous an enemy. They are hunted with trained dogs. They take to a tree when the pursuers get too close, and, if the dogs lose the scent, are apt to drop on the unwary hunter from above. Johan knew all about them, though we never saw one; I would have liked to take part in a hunt, but we never had time at Ruana.

We did, however, chance upon a family of wolves which had been attacking the cattle. I had asked Richard to what extent he lost stock to wild animals, and he mentioned that wolves had been after the calves; he thought probably they were the descendants of dogs of the Alsatian type which had gone wild and turned killer.

It happened in this way:

One fine morning Johan and I were following the crest of a low ridge across the *serra*; we were carrying rifles, as we often did. After an hour's riding three of the *campeiros* came up behind and rode along with us for a few miles. They were swarthy fellows, mostly of Indian blood, I should say, with black hair and long black moustaches, who sat their mounts as if they had been born there. They were courteous and shy, inter-

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ested in the stranger, but only when he was apparently unaware of their interest. We exchanged cigarettes, black tobacco for blond, and talked above the jingle of bridles and the sweet blowing of horses and felt the hot sun on our necks and the cool wind in our faces. White clouds bellied above the horizon and sometimes their shadow swept across the wide earth and the tall grasses waved. The soil of Ruana always seemed to me to be alive, to exist positively; I felt that if I dismounted and stooped and laid the palm of my hand on the earth I would feel a distant pulse, deep but young and strong.

We reined in for a moment to look at the long, winding furrow cut by an army of ants during the night in their march across the valley. The grasses were neatly severed at the root, cut into lengths of an inch or two as if by a mower, and now were drying in the sun. There were many such armies. Wherever the earth was open it was dotted with ant-hills each three or four feet high with a ventilation funnel at the summit; they were not in fact built by ants but by termites — blind ants, as they are sometimes called; the ant-hills spring up in a night and after a few hours in the sun are as hard as concrete and formidable enough to wreck an aircraft, which they sometimes do indeed; cleared airstrips are much favoured by termites.

We rode along the crest of the ridge and presently the three peons turned down into the valley, raising their hands and calling: '*Até logo!*'

*"Telogo, 'telogo!"*

They jogged down the slopes, their mounts belly-deep in the grasses, down into the valley where white

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cattle shone like patches of snow among the trees.

It was then that we saw the wolves. The bush on our right fell away by and by and opened to a sandy, stony clearing about thirty yards across. In the sun on the edge of the clearing there were five big, tawny dogs. Two of them were lolling over a carcass — a baby tapir, as we discovered — while the other three dozed. For a moment they stared, yellow-eyed, hackles stiff, teeth bared.

Johan shouted and we were both firing wildly. By chance rather than by aim, for my own horse reared at the first shot, we scored two hits. The rest of them vanished into the undergrowth. One of the two we had hit — mine, I have no doubt — was twitching and yelping and Johan fired again and it lay still.

‘We didn’t get them all,’ Johan said mournfully. He shook his head. ‘We didn’t get the others.’ A missed target always upset him; he would remember it for days and go about his business shaking his head and muttering to himself.

We rode across the clearing to have a look at the dead wolves. They were hefty, savage-looking creatures with unkempt pelts and long tails, very much the Alsatian run wild. When I suggested we should do something about burying them, Johan shrugged and looked up. He motioned towards the first of the vultures circling above.

‘There’s one man there is no job for in Mato Grosso,’ he said: ‘the undertaker.’

It grew hot later in the morning. We came down into a declivity where a stream fell over the stones among the trees; a pleasant, cool place.

‘Like a drink?’



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He dismounted and dipped a can into the clear water.

'Is it good water?'

'The best I ever tasted. Magic water.' He held up the can, smiling. 'People who drink this water,' he said, 'always come back to Mato Grosso.'

Before the Zebu was imported into Brazil from India, not many years ago, the few cattle bred on the *serra* were Tucura, a race something akin to the Texas Long Horn. The Tucura failed; tropical conditions were too severe for them; they had no resistance to foot-and-mouth disease and no capacity for overland long-distance travel, of both of which there is necessarily a good deal in the business of buying and breeding cattle in Mato Grosso.

Zebu are massive, humped beasts, white or smoke-grey in colour, with a high, wide spread of horn; they flourish in country and conditions which would dispose of any other breed in a few weeks. The most favoured breeding grounds are the swamps of the Pantanal, where pastures, when not under water, are lush and green. For a human being the Pantanal is, of course, a hellish place, where the summer temperature can rise to something like 110°. For Zebu it is ideal.

'What happens to the cattle when the Paraguay rises?' I asked Richard one day.

'Nothing. They wade to a bit of higher ground.'

'Are there no *piranha*?'

'Oh yes, quite a lot. We have losses, of course, but not too many.'

The *piranha* is the scourge of the rivers of Brazil, particularly the Paraguay and its tributaries. They weigh

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two or three pounds each, hunt in shoals of hundreds or even thousands, and their voracity is such that they will devour even one another in the frenzy to get at bleeding flesh. The slightest taint of blood in the water will bring them in a frightful, frantic rush to the source of the odour; at Corumbá, on the Paraguay, where I happened to see them in action, it is dangerous even to put one's foot in the water whether scratched and bleeding or not, since they will take a nip at it by way of investigation. They can drag a man in and in the space of a few seconds reduce him to a clean, white skeleton; about two minutes is the time they take to perform the same service for a Zebu cow. To hold one alive in one's hand is an excellent way to get a look at their teeth. An Indian fisherman on the Paraguay did so for my benefit one afternoon; the jaws snapped and clashed as he gripped the creature behind the gills so that I could run a finger across the bladed teeth — across, as one would test a knife edge.

To tell the truth I had always reacted to the reputation of the *piranha* with incredulity till I saw what they could do: I now submit, with reservations only on the score of that other masterpiece of Brazilian rivers, the *arraia* (or sting ray), a creature said to haunt the mud banks in large numbers. The *arraia* sting is usually fatal in that the victim dies not of poison but of pain. I am assured that if you are stung by a ray you roll about for the space of perhaps thirty hours, finally to expire raving mad, but not having witnessed such a thing one can go on staunchly disbelieving.

It occurs to me that to describe in the space of a few

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pages the interesting deaths which can befall man and beast even in southern Mato Grosso gives an entirely false impression of the country; the reader comes to believe the place a ghastly nightmare of spiders that gnaw at one's feet in every bathroom, snakes that converge on one's defenceless legs from every thicket, and *piranha* and sting ray, leaving aside professional gunmen, that dog one's innocent footsteps. If I have given such an impression I hasten to modify it. Let it be said that the chances of death or even mishap from such impedimenta in Brazil are very much remoter than the chances of death or mutilation on the roads out of any civilised city on a pleasant Sunday morning, and moreover that though the reader may be appalled by the violence of life in Mato Grosso, the people who live there are twice as horrified by the accounts they hear of the number of children we butcher on the roads of Britain and America every week, by the busy-ness of our mental asylums, the increase in the number of crimes of sex, and by the prevalence of the common cold.

Take Johan, for instance. Now Johan has been bitten twice by snakes, once by a bushmaster, a South American rattlesnake rather bigger and more venomous than its northern cousin, and once by an *ulutu*. Johan thinks nothing of a snake bite; indeed it would not be going too far to say that Johan is secretly enthusiastic about being bitten by snakes.

'I was fishing in the river for *dourado*,' he said. 'By the way, one day we do some serious fishing. While I was fishing last year I was bitten. That is where most snakes like to be, near the water. It came up behind me

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and bit me in the ankle, just here.' He put his hand down to his heel. 'It was an *ulutu*, which is the only kind of snake that jumps, and the only kind that will attack you even when you don't disturb it.'

'Quite a snake.'

'A splendid snake. Very beautiful.'

We were sitting on the verandah drinking before dinner. Don Ricardo, having had a boring and tiring day in his office by the corrals, was content to listen.

Johan told us how he had hobbled to his horse, somehow mounted it, and rode as fast as he was able for the nearest habitation. Every inhabited place in the interior of Brazil is compelled by law to keep a stock of the three standard types of serum, one against the bite of the coral snake, one of the bushmaster, and one for use against the bite of all other types, the anti-toxin being distributed by the national snake farm at São Paulo. Richard told me that the station-master of a cattle-halt down the line was a renowned collector of snakes and had sent no fewer than nine hundred to Butantan last year; the authorities, properly grateful, had shown their esteem of his public-spiritedness by sending him a flowered tea-service.

I asked how much serum constituted an injection.

'The bigger the animal, the greater its resistance to the poison, and the smaller the injection,' Richard said. 'I lose an average of one head of cattle a month by snake bite. You can always tell when they've been bitten: the leg swells up and they bleed from the nose. Well, a Zebu cow needs very little to put her right, a man correspondingly more. If the corral cat gets a bite, you blow her up like a football.'

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'How much time have you?' My interest was not altogether impersonal; we all walked about in the corals and in deep grass.

'It depends on the snake. With most of them a man has three or four hours' grace, but if you don't get your injection in that time you're a dead duck. If you're bitten by a coral snake you have perhaps half an hour.'

I saw several coral snakes in the next few days. They are not only the most plentiful, they are also the most lethal. The coral is easy to recognise by its gay red-and-white markings. They have a disagreeable habit of coming into the house during heavy rain.

'What are the after-effects of a bite?'

'Ask Johan.'

'Damned painful to start with,' Johan said. 'You're very sick for several days and you come out in boils. I show you.' With modest pride he leaned forward and hauled up his trouser legs. Both his legs were covered with evil black blotches.

'Good God, why don't you see a doctor and get it cleared up?' I asked.

He shrugged. 'It's harmless.'

'You might want to go into a swimming pool.'

'Me?' He laughed. 'Where?'

There was no sound answer to that.

He caressed his calves. 'It will go away in time,' he said regretfully.

The clamour which periodically sundered the peace of Ruana broke out again on the rear porch. There in the evening sunlight, in a hammock slung across the verandah, lay the baby recently produced by one of the

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dark, mute ladies of the domestic staff. Every time the baby howled, Johan's two parrots which lived in a tree just beyond the verandah rail also howled, whether companionably or out of pure malevolence made little odds, the effect was the same. Taitt, cursing happily, endeavoured to quell the outbreak, which nevertheless continued till one by one the contestants fell silent, exhausted, and the uproar subsided.

Don Ricardo and Johan were discussing the refrigeration of foot-and-mouth vaccine in the Pantanal, which is a major problem in that place and climate. I was reminded of the way in which a fellow passenger had dealt with a similar difficulty in the course of the voyage from Tilbury to Rio. He was an earnest Anglo-Brazilian, not more than thirty, as I remember him, whose face wore a vague, worried frown throughout the voyage. He appeared one evening in my cabin door, which was usually open, and, narrowing his eyes at the cramped spaces of my cabin, said without a trace of animosity:

'Your cabin is bigger than mine.'

Presently he nodded. 'That's it. I've got an engine-room ventilator shaft in the corner. It cuts across that corner,' he informed me gravely. 'Right across.'

He seemed to wish me to verify this assertion for myself, so I wrapped a towel about my middle and followed him across the corridor. There was no doubt but that one corner of his cabin was occupied by an engine-room ventilator shaft, from which moreover there emanated a loud and pernicious hum.

'It's noisy, too, isn't it?' I offered.

'It's the room it takes up,' he said.

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Something in the air immediately above his head caught my eye and I looked up. Across the ceiling of his cabin there was a devious network of lengths of string somewhat in the manner of a spider's web, from the centre of which hung a match-box, gyrating frantically in the breeze set up by the fan.

'What on earth is that?'

'Which?' He looked up worriedly. 'Oh, that. That's a whooping-cough injection.'

'A what?'

'A whooping-cough injection,' he repeated.

'No, really?'

'The whooping-cough injections you get in England are much better than the ones we get in Brazil,' he said, 'so I'm taking one back for my little girl.'

'Has she got whooping cough?' I enquired.

'No,' he admitted. 'No. But she's bound to get it sooner or later.' We gazed up at the match-box which whirled and spun in the stifling air.

'But what's it doing up there?' I asked.

'Oh, I put it up there,' he said, 'so that the fan would keep it cool.'

## 6

IN the morning Taitt was waiting at the foot of the Iverandah steps, rather injured that he had not been informed of the day's activities in advance, but ready as always to enlighten the listener on the subject of time-tables.

'Now, there's a train from Buenos Aires to Santiago, sah, which leaves Buenos Aires at around seven in the morning. A fine train, that one, sah — the Transandean. There's a tunnel, a long tunnel under the mountains. Gits held up by snow sometimes. Then from Santiago you go 'way down to Valpa, yassah, Valparaiso, takes about three hours, electric, very fast electric, a fine train. Then from Valpa there's sailings all over the Pacific. You going across the Pacific, sah?'

'Not this time, Taitt.'

'I done it many times, yassah, many times.'

The truck's engine ticked over and the driver poked his head out of the window to shout something in Portuguese to the old Negro, who blandly ignored him and advised me to do likewise. 'Pay no 'tention, mass'.'

We were going that morning to Cervo, a *retireiro*, or sub-*fazenda*, some thirty miles out across the *serra*, part of Ruana still, but under the local authority of an *administrador* responsible to Don Ricardo. It was too far to go on horseback and then round up, inoculate, sort and brand a hundred head of Zebu calves all in a day, so we



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travelled by truck, an open Ford; mounts would be available at Cervo. Richard, Johan and I clambered into the back of the truck and we jolted down the hill till we met the track that swung away towards the open country.

We pitched and rattled over the *serra* at an alarming speed. 'You have to make time where you can,' Richard bawled as we hung on, 'or you never get anywhere in this country.' The sacks of salt bounced on the boards. One by one we dropped them off; the *campeiros* knew where to find them and where to feed them to the herds, which would then lick the salted area till even the turf was gone and the earth showed bare and black. Richard pointed to an area of short green grass across the hillside.

'That's a "burn,"' he shouted. 'Zebu won't eat long grass, so we burn it down a few acres at a time in the rainy season, and then let it grow again. It takes about three weeks.'

We passed through a tongue of forest travelling slowly, for here the undergrowth grew across the track a few days after clearing, and there was a danger of subsidences where armies of ants had burrowed beneath the surface. As we came out into the open Johan suddenly shouted and thumped on the roof of the driver's cabin and we pulled up short. Johan had his rifle at his shoulder and was following a deer going across our right flank, but it was at least six hundred yards away and moving fast, bounding. He lowered the muzzle. Nobody said anything; Johan grinned and went pink.

Then a mile or two farther on I saw a black animal of some kind moving through the grasses about two

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hundred yards away to our left. 'What's that?'

'Ant-eater,' Richard said. He banged on the cabin roof. 'A big one. Come on, we'll round him up and get a photograph.'

We jumped out of the truck and dived into the deep grass. Johan went off at an angle to head the animal down the hill, Richard went to the right to cut off its retreat into the valley, I floundered towards the area in which I had last seen it, but not very swiftly. There would be snakes on this hillside and running blind through that high undergrowth was rather like running through a minefield. As I ran I tried to set the camera. There was nothing for it but to forget discretion and blunder along as fast as might be.

I heard Johan shouting up the hillside. His battered hat showed above the grasses and we all headed for the clump of trees where Richard was calling and beating the undergrowth. I caught a glimpse of a long, low-built animal with a snout like the nozzle of a fireman's hose, a black coat and a most beautiful tail, thick and wide and glossy, which undulated like plumage as the creature floundered from cover to cover. It broke from the undergrowth and paused, snout lifted, panting for breath, giving off an abominable stink. We kept clear; ant-eaters have no teeth but they will wrap themselves about one's legs or body and will not let go till they are killed; we had no wish to kill him. I took a couple of hasty photographs which unexpectedly survived processing three or four months later, and we watched the animal trundle away into the trees.

Once, during the drive, we heard the far-away whistle

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of a railway engine; it was an odd sound to hear in such a place. Richard's references to the railway were ironic, then as always. Nobody knows when the trains will arrive or depart; it is nothing unusual for them to be three or four days late, and as a means of shifting stock from Mato Grosso to the fattening camps and slaughter-houses of São Paulo they are more hazardous than useful; they will hold no more than two hundred head, and are seldom available; cattle that have been seven days or more without water are, if they survive at all, in poor shape.

'How do you move the stock, then?'

'On foot,' Richard said.

'How far is it?'

'Not far short of a thousand miles.'

The cattle drives of Brazil are something to capture the imagination. Later, in Corumbá, I met a man named Witholt, another Dutchman, who had taken part in one.

The big stock movements that took place during the opening up of the Wild West of the United States, if the horse operas of Hollywood are to be believed, were relatively tame affairs by comparison with these, if only because in Brazil nature is very much wilder. The herds are assembled in the swamps of the Pantanal and consist of not fewer than a thousand head of Zebu. The driving team, called a *comitiva*, consists of twelve *campeiros*, each with his own remounts and supplies, and is led by a *comissario*; Hermenegildo, he of the stencilled features and fastidious manner whom I met at Ruana that first morning, was one such. The most important member of the team, and the highest paid, is the cook, on the

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sound principle that only a well-fed cow-hand can withstand work of that kind in conditions which test endurance to somewhere near its limits; moreover they all carry arms, are in close contact with one another over a period of months, and are apt to settle their differences promptly: a man with a full stomach is less inclined to quarrel with his associates. Even with the best of cooks, however, and the most ruthless of leaders, a *comitiva* does well to reach the other end of the trek with eight or nine of its members on their horses.

I asked what became of the others.

'Fever,' Richard said. 'Insect bite, snake bite. Accidents, sometimes. Men get tired of one another very quickly in those circumstances. One shoots another. One can't stand it and clears off in the night with his mounts. One or two have to be left behind, sick, to get better and catch up. . . .'

The worst of the hazards are the river crossings. When the river is infested with *piranha* or alligators, it is quite customary to take two or more of the oldest cows, or perhaps those which are sick and lagging, slash them about the chest and belly till they bleed, then drive them into the river above and below the place chosen for the crossing. While they are being devoured the rest of the herd is hustled across in the centre, *piranha* taking the hindmost.

'How many head do you reckon to lose, then, on a drive like that?'

Richard shrugged and said: 'I pay the *comissario* to take a thousand head of Zebu to São Paulo. The *comissario* pays the losses.'

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'That's a little hard on the *comissario*, isn't it?'

'Very, but that's the system. It's also an effective way of persuading him to take care of the cattle. If you didn't do it that way you'd lose twenty per cent of your stock.'

'I could think of easier ways of earning a living.'

'So could I.'

'Do they make a lot of money?'

'Next to nothing, as a matter of fact.'

'Then why do they go on with it.'

'They love it. It's like a drug. They hate it, but they can't leave it alone. It satisfies something.'

After a while I asked Richard if he ever went back to England.

'Now and then,' he said. 'On business, or leave. I'm usually glad to get back here.'

'You like it.'

'Yes, I like it.' That was all he would say.

On another day I asked him why none of his assistants was British. Since the parent company was British, it seemed curious that Richard alone was from the United Kingdom.

He said: 'It isn't really a matter of race. It's a question of temperament. We have to take them where we can get them. There's no objection to Englishmen — on the contrary, we'd naturally sooner have them. When we find one who seems the right sort of fellow we give him a trial. The trouble is, they don't seem to like work very much. We tried a young fellow last year. He had to be sent home.'

'What went wrong?'

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'The usual. Too many women, too much drink.'

The only women I had seen at Ruana were the rather shapeless ladies of *cafuso* blood who comprised the domestic staff; it was hard to imagine the most susceptible young man running amok in such a roost.

'They go into Campo Grande,' Richard said. 'And it's not good enough. If you behave better than the Brazilian he will treat you as an equal: if you behave as he does, he'll treat you with contempt. And you can't do business on that footing. I'm not talking about the white man's superiority — that's dead and done with. I'm talking about buying and selling cattle in Brazil.' He went on: 'You're free here. You have to stand up by yourself. There are no laws, no policemen, no conventions to prop you up. You're on your own. Well, some can rise to it, some can't. Maybe they've been propped up too long, I don't know. Perhaps that's why they go sprawling when the props are taken away.' Then he said: 'A lot of people seem to be chasing about after the freedom of the individual. I sometimes wonder what in hell would happen if they got it.'

Cervo lay on the banks of a river. Mato Grosso is laced with brown, swirling torrents; they are navigable by small boats but the majority are not mapped and their names have a local significance only.

There was a small white ranch-house, hardly bigger than a cottage, two or three outbuildings and the corrals on the gentle slope above the river and the trees. In the yard a gigantic sow suckled her litter and a few dogs and chickens scratched themselves in the shade of a tree,

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where there was a trestle table and a couple of benches. Here lived the *administrador*, a genial, bulky man who had been a sergeant in the army and who apparently considered himself a cut above the *campeiros* and peons. He had three very marriageable daughters, dusky-skinned, sultry wenches with blazing green eyes, but a peon with ideas about marrying one of them was invariably met by papa armed with a shot-gun. 'My daughters will marry well,' he said, 'or not at all.' Where else the three daughters might find husbands in that lonely place it would be hard to say. The situation was full of probabilities.

The *administrador*, Richard and two cow-hands rode over the hill to round up the cattle which were to be sorted and branded. One of the peons was a Paraguayan named José, a neat, dapper young man whom we had brought with us from Ruana in the truck. The Paraguayans are the best of all the Brazilian cow-punchers, for they are intelligent, hard-working and extraordinarily clever with their raw-hide lassos. As the day wore on, José, dusty and sweat-soaked, discarded his clothing piece by piece, shirt, hat, riding boots, till he was wearing nothing but breeches and a rawhide apron, tussling with frightened Zebu calves in the sunset.

Johan and I had an hour to kill. 'We fish,' said Johan. 'We will do a little fishing for *dourado*.'

We shot a bird, cut it open, trailed it in the river on a length of cord, and then dropped a baited line in its wake. Nothing happened. The bloodied bird bounced on the fast-moving water; its blood was supposed to attract the fish, which would then take the hook. But

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nothing happened. The river raced away round the bend, but it offered up no fish. The *dourado*, so called for his golden scales, weighs up to twenty pounds; when hooked they fight hard, leaping from the water; they are rather like salmon to eat, and excellent. We caught several thereafter, but none that morning.

'No golden treasure today,' Johan said.

He told me, however, of another kind of treasure, probably to be found along the banks of this river. When the Jesuits were ejected from Bolivia some of them attempted to reach the Atlantic by the overland route, using these rivers, and they brought their wealth with them. Most of them never reached the coast. As the way grew harder they buried their treasure in the river banks. 'It's still there,' Johan said, 'if you can find it.' He described some of the curious markings and pointers, patterns of rock laid by man, which he had come across along the river courses.

There is probably something in his theory. Towards the end of the eighteenth century there were no less than twenty-eight Jesuit missions in Bolivia, every one of which owned and operated a gold or silver mine for the greater glory of the Church.

We worked all day, driving the cattle from one corral to another, along the fenced corridor where they could be inoculated against mastitis and black-leg, on through the sorting gates operated by the *administrador* perched on a platform above. 'It's pretty primitive,' Richard said, 'but it works.' The calves were corralled according to physical merit, colour, age, size and Don Ricardo's own



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judgment of which were worth keeping or better sold. 'I want them white, pure white.'

Once we stopped for a few minutes and sat on the benches beneath the tree in the yard, and the foreman's wife, a silent, handsome woman with grey hair, served us with *maté*, standing in the centre of the circle with a jug of water in her hand with which to refill the cup after each guest had taken a draw through the silver pipe. It is a pleasant little ceremony; the tea, mixed to a green paste, is brackish to the taste but wonderfully refreshing. The cup is passed round from the drinker to the hostess and back to the next man, till all in their turn have declined. While we sat there an old man rode down over the hill with a boy on the ragged sheepskin pommel of his horse. He left the boy outside, entered and greeted the company, and took a seat. He was a stranger. Nobody asked him questions. When he was refreshed he thanked the hostess and bowed politely to the company.

*'Até logo.'*

He mounted his pony, lifted the boy on to the pommel, and rode away over the hill.

In the afternoon we branded eighty-odd calves. Half a dozen at a time were driven into the corral where, suspecting something amiss, or perhaps appalled by the stench of burned hide, they scampered hither and thither trying to avoid José's devilish noose. It whirled, miraculously settled about the front legs of the selected victim which in its frantic efforts to escape then contrived to throw and wind itself, in this way saving a great deal of work; a calf lassoed about the neck has to be thrown by force and it is a strenuous, tiring business. Two of

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the peons then threw themselves on to the unhappy creature, another took a grip of the lashing hind leg, Richard or I shouted for the branding iron, pressed it for a second on the quivering hide, and the calf, outraged but unhurt, pranced away.

And so finally there were only the three pigs to hoist into the truck, which was already loaded deep with corn-cobs. Two of the pigs were hustled into a box through whose bars they could thrust their snouts and bellow, while the third was allowed to escape for no better reason than that its recapture would be diverting. Presently, however, roped about its trotters, it was slung into the back of the vehicle with the others.

To attribute to domestic animals the emotions of human beings is an affectation whose cosiness shrivels my bowels; animals have not the same emotional reactions as mankind. Nor had the three pigs. After a moment of what might have been stunned incredulity at finding themselves deposited in a truckload of ripe corn-cobs, they simply began to eat. We drove home and the moon came up and the beam of the headlights was alive with the glitter of small wings.

In the evenings Richard would talk about cattle-rearing whenever prompted, but there is something about the day-to-day administration of a farm of whatever kind which, I have learned, inevitably leads on to other things. There was a time, not many years ago, when I was planning to write something whose background would be agricultural; realising I knew nothing whatever about it, I went first to a library to see what there was to read

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on the subject, of a not over-technical nature. On a secluded and rarely disturbed shelf I chanced on a book called *A Farmer's Year*, by a man named Haggard. Unbelieving yet drawn by the name's ancient magnetism, I picked it up, to find that the author was indeed Rider Haggard, who it appeared had at one time owned no fewer than five farms in East Anglia, all of which he ran with perfect competence. I took the book home; not to have done so would have been like passing an old friend in the street without a greeting because one has grown away from him. And I read it.

I had expected solemnity, tragedy. I listened for the note of gloom that tolls on the first page of all but a few of his works and continues to peal at intervals to the end. The contrary was the case: *A Farmer's Year* is a humorous, almost light-hearted account of Rider Haggard's activities as a farmer during one completed year, full of anecdote and pleasant digression. I found it very good reading.

One of the anecdotes with which the diary was graced concerned Chateaubriand, who it seemed had spent some part of his life as a young man in Suffolk. This alone was piquant enough. What in heaven's name was the Vicomte de Chateaubriand, Chevalier de Combourg, doing in the little market town of Bungay in the year 1793? Haggard did not pursue the matter very far: probably it didn't interest him much. Still, the carrot was an appetising one and I jogged along behind it for some time. The theory of farming was forgotten, and so also before very long was the book I had thought of writing, in the light of which I count the chance that drew me to

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*A Farmer's Year* as little less than an act of God.

The Chateaubriand family was an impoverished one, by any standards, but very ancient. Young René inherited a distinguished place beneath the guillotine. However, he contrived to escape, though quite penniless, and made his way to England. From London he drifted out to Bungay — I have never been able to discover how or why — and there became tutor in French to the daughter of the vicar of St. Margaret's, a neighbouring parish. The vicar was the Reverend John Ives, and his daughter, Charlotte. There was also Mrs. Ives.

The Ives family were typical enough of their kind. Charlotte was dark and pretty, this we know because Chateaubriand afterwards wrote of her: he called her *Celuta*. Mrs. Ives seems to have been a stout, large-hearted body with some social ambitions and a great wish to see her only child well married. They were quite comfortably-off: there was no reason at all why there should not be a title in the family.

The Reverend Ives himself played little part in what followed. He was a cultured man and enjoyed talking now and then with Charlotte's tutor, who, though only twenty-five, had travelled in America and was widely read as well; outside of a cursory interest in his flock, however, the vicar appears to have devoted the greater part of his time to drinking, to such a tune indeed that tales of his prowess spread beyond the boundaries of his parish and came to the ears of the then Duke of Bedford, himself a drinker of considerable distinction. It was plain to the Duke that two such reputations could not exist harmoniously side by side, so he issued a challenge to the vicar, the

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match to take place at one of the Duke's hunting-lodges not far from Bungay. The Reverend Ives accepted the challenge with equanimity and on the appointed evening presented himself for dinner at the lodge.

It is said that they drank port for roughly seven hours, at the end of which His Grace slipped quietly and decently under the table. The vicar rose, pulled the bell-rope, ordered a stiff brandy of the duke's butler, and strolled home. When he reached the vicarage, Mrs. Ives, who had sat up in bed with her crochet-work till her husband should return, met him as he climbed the stairs. She asked him who was the victor. The Reverend answered: 'The Church remains triumphant,' lost his foothold and fell from the top of the stairs to the bottom on his stomach, where he remained for the rest of the night, for he was a cumbersome man. At all events, he watched Mrs. Ives's efforts to marry off their daughter with indifference.

The chief suitor at that time was a young naval officer, more inarticulate than silent, named Sutton. It was Mrs. Ives's simple device to play off the adoring lieutenant against the handsome young Vicomte. When Chateaubriand arrived to give Charlotte another French lesson, she was engaged with the lieutenant, who was instructing her on the subject of naval strategy; and when the lieutenant presented himself, alas, Charlotte was having another French lesson. Charlotte herself was head over heels in love with the inscrutable young Frenchman; who presently moved into the vicarage.

Still he failed to come to the point. Plainly it was his poverty that troubled him, and Mrs. Ives understood. Following a consultation with her husband, who left it

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entirely to her, she took Chateaubriand aside and informed him fondly that he need no longer delay his request for Charlotte's hand; it was all arranged; the Almighty had seen fit to endow the Ives family quite generously; they would attend to everything. In fact the young man had their full permission to make Charlotte his wife without hesitation.

Chateaubriand, fairly trapped, admitted the worst. 'Alas, madame, I am already married.'

Mrs. Ives, showing a keen sense of what was appropriate, fainted.

The Vicomtesse, Célèste Buisson, it transpired, was in the town jail of Rennes, having been caught and taken there by the local Tribunal while Chateaubriand himself was elsewhere.

Mrs. Ives threw him out neck and crop, and not long after, Charlotte, broken-hearted, married the lieutenant. In the course of time the lieutenant was promoted, lost a leg at Trafalgar, developed a bald head and presently died, leaving Charlotte a prosperous, pretty widow with two sons. She seems to have filled in some of her time with a certain Colonel 'A', whose identity remains elusive. At all events she continued to live in Suffolk.

Chateaubriand, meanwhile, returned to France and devoted himself to his diplomatic and literary talents, of both of which he had an abundance.

It is said, though without a shred of supporting evidence, that a year or two later, in 1822, to be exact, Charlotte received an invitation to attend a reception at the home of the French ambassador to the Court of St. James's. Puzzled but nothing loath, she took the coach to

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London, dressed herself in her most becoming weeds, and at the appointed time presented herself. Since her host was Chateaubriand, recently appointed to lead the French embassy in London, she was perhaps not wholly dismayed to find herself the only guest.

At all events, true or only wishful, the reunion has the merit that it provides the tale with an ending.

The lounge at Ruana was full of books and magazines. There were *onça* and puma skins on the floor, trophies and diplomas of various kinds on the walls and shelves; the chairs were comfortable and the drinks cold. For the rest, the personality of its tenant, you had to look elsewhere: in the chance remark, the aside, the expression of opinion on some other subject altogether. His love was cattle and the huge territory of which he was the virtual ruler, that was clear. He suffered a little, I believe, from the loneliness of rulers, but he enjoyed his power and used it discreetly. Since I left Ruana I have heard that he has left there to start another major *fazenda* from nothing; his new kingdom is at the moment virgin forest. Wherever it may be it is sure that Richard's real name — this one is pseudonymous — will be as well liked and respected in that part of Brazil as it is now in southern Mato Grosso. Such men, when they occur, are worth half a dozen embassies; they represent more than themselves or their companies, more than a national viewpoint; they demonstrate a conception in action.

It takes the traveller several weeks to accustom himself to the bewildering fact that in Brazil the British on the whole are liked. It strikes one unmistakably time

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and again. Whether because the British are no longer in a position to dominate either economically or militarily, or whether it is because a handful of individuals like Don Ricardo and Arthur Thomas and a few others have gone about their business scrupulously over a considerable period, one doesn't know; there may be other factors. The startling truth remains that Brazilians still clinch an unwritten agreement with the words, '*Palavra inglez,*' which mean 'Englishman's word' — without irony.



CAMPO GRANDE was as inflammable as a bored woman. Corumbá, so far as I was ever able to see, contained no explosive material that had not long since rotted away in its own frightful climate; this was the town I had picked out on a map one winter night in London.

It lies at an altitude of 200 feet above sea-level, which is to say that it is virtually at sea-level; but the sea is 1200 miles away; there is only the great brown river flowing heavily by at the end of the main street; all about lie the steaming swamps of the Pantanal. What prompted the early Portuguese settlers to found a town in such a place is known to God alone; they built a few fortresses where they shared a frontier with the Spaniards in Bolivia, and traces of them are to be found here and there in the forests, but there was no fortress at Corumbá. Corumbá was simply a town. Scraps of its ponderous baroque architecture still remain as walls or gateways that rise among the giant nettles and rushes on the banks of the river.

For seven days I tried to escape the place, striking a futile compromise between making no movement at all in order to avoid sweating too lavishly, and taking the steps necessary to fleeing altogether. I might have saved myself the trouble: I ran with sweat day and night whether I moved or not; you can sit perfectly still in

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Corumbá and, if it interests you, watch the perspiration course down your forearms and drip from your wrists. And not all my steps, my threats, pleas, arguments, rage or supplication made the smallest difference to my plight.

As time passed, the smile on the odious face of the manager of the town's ramshackle travel agency, through whom I tried to book a passage to Santa Cruz in Bolivia, Cochabamba, La Paz, Cuiabá, or in the last resort to practically anywhere in earth, seemed to me to undergo a series of subtle changes. At first it was friendly, interested; then it was hopeful on my behalf, then understanding, then compassionate; after the first four days its pity came to have a slightly sinister quality, I thought; on the fifth day it was gloating, and on the sixth it was unquestionably fiendish. It was then that panic set in.

But that came later. On the first day all was well; the town's one hotel was not too uncomfortable, though the provender was atrocious. The principal street ran down the slope of the hill to the river, where there was a jetty for the use of the river steamers which came up from Asunción, in Paraguay, once a fortnight, and for the loading of occasional consignments of the town's produce, hides and skins, jerked beef and ipecac. There were a number of general stores along the main street, plastered with glaring announcements of their sales; since they were all having a sale, and since, I learned, there is no time of the year at which they are not all having a sale, the dash of enterprise tended to lose its impact and the stores continued to be customless. The side streets ebbed away into crumbling ruins, brambles and the swamp.

However, there was a bar on the sidewalk of the

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high street from which one could observe most of the town's activities without moving an inch. But for the attentions of the town's idiot boy, who conceived a peculiar attachment for me, I could and did spend a decent proportion of each day peaceably seated in the bar watching what there was to watch and drinking quantities of *pinga* and gin *con agua tonica*.

The idiot boy's means of passing the time were not exclusively his, I remarked, though he alone had brought them to perfection. As he lounged against a wall contemplating his own boredom his face would suddenly take on an aspect of industrious determination and he would set off up the street at a rattling pace, clearly bent on matters of the highest consequence; but then in a few yards he either forgot what he was about, or he realised he was fast heading out of town; his step faltered, then pattered out altogether, and he would resume his position against another wall. People were doing this all the time in Corumbá. While they were on the move it was unusually impressive: the place hummed with activity. But it was bogus; they started, continued, hesitated, came to a discreet, rather furtive standstill, took a short rest, and then set off in the opposite direction; the devil of it was there was nowhere to go.

I observed this curious characteristic of Corumbá with tolerant amusement for some time, till the day, in fact, when to my horror I caught myself doing exactly the same thing, debouching empty-handed from the travel agency, setting off up the street at a brisk, determined pace, faltering, halting eventually for the reason that I had not the least notion where I was going. I looked

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round to see whether anybody had remarked my odd behaviour: nobody had: I set off severely in the other direction. When I realised what I was doing I bolted for the bar and there stubbornly remained, resisting the urge to get up and with a wild laugh throw myself into the crazy to-ing and fro-ing of my fellow beings.

Happily there was a rival impulsion. On the other side of the street, opposite the bar, there lived a girl of blazing beauty, a dark, sinuous creature, very tall, and with the body of a Diana; her clothes served to emphasise rather than conceal her loveliness. From time to time she sunned herself in her doorway.

One day when I returned to the hotel I saw a white girl at the foot of the steps teaching four Indian children the technique of archery. The children had made primitive little bows and arrows. The girl, who seemed to be about thirty, was talking to them in Portuguese, though not without accent; she was telling them how to grip the arrow, draw the bow till the cord was level with the ear, and then let fly so that the cord, released, all but brushed the cheek. She was North American and her name, for purposes of this account, was Jane.

'You know a good deal about it,' I ventured.

She looked up with a shy grin. 'I was state champ,' she said, 'once upon a time.'

She was a well set up, sturdy girl with a charming smile and, as it transpired, a marvellous capacity for rendering the unusual perfectly normal. I asked her what she was doing in Corumbá.

'I'm a geologist,' she said.

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I had never met a female geologist before. 'A practising geologist?'

'Sure,' she said. 'Why not?'

I was taken aback. 'Qualified?'

'Well, of course.'

'Whatever prompted you to try that?'

'Oh, I just thought it would be nice to be a geologist for a while.'

A sound piece of reasoning; most of us would not lift a hand without a reason, and such a reason as that would appal us.

'Where do you practise?'

'Pretty well anywhere,' she said. 'Wherever my company sends me.' She worked for a Brazilian organisation whose headquarters were in São Paulo. 'Around here right now.'

I asked her what she was looking for particularly.

'Magnesium.'

'Here in the Pantanal?'

'On the edge,' she said. 'South of here, a few hours ride in a jeep, there's quite an outcrop of rock. There's a whole lot of it there.'

'Do you dig it up?'

'Jiminy, no. Just samples. I identify the deposits and chart them, that's all.'

'How many are there of you?'

'Here? Just me.'

I asked her if she would have a drink.

'Why, thanks,' she said. 'I'd love one.'

As time passed my respect for Jane deepened. She told me how she worked. Usually her trips into the

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forest lasted four or five days at a stretch, and she would put up in the outhouse or barn of the nearest Indian farmer; this consisted of slinging her hammock between the uprights of the barn and washing, when opportunity offered, under the pump or in a stream. In the morning she would set out with a mestizo for company, whose function it was to beat the undergrowth for snakes. She moved about the forest with her instruments, digging up samples of rock, testing them, mapping the site when they proved valuable. Then she returned to Corumbá to report and send off her samples and maps.

She was quite unaware of her own uniqueness. She talked of her work very readily, but in such a way that she appeared neither modest nor vainglorious, being oblivious to both. Jane was herself alone, and she was good; any lack of modesty with which the reader may tax her is my fault, not hers, for, suspecting that she had other cards up her sleeve, I forced her to play them. Once I heard her speaking French to one of the waiters in the hotel and I asked her where she had learned it. 'Do you know France well?'

'A little,' she admitted. 'I was married to a Frenchman for a time.'

I supposed she had served in Europe during the war in one of the auxiliary services. Yes, she had.

'Red Cross?'

'No, I was piloting bombers, as a matter of fact.'

'I might have known it.'

'Not fighting,' she said hastily. 'Just ferrying them over.'

'Just ferrying bombers over the Atlantic.'

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‘Yes.’ I saw her stiffen a little.

‘So you’re a qualified pilot as well, Jane.’

She laughed and went pink. ‘Oh, now, look, you don’t have to laugh at me.’

‘My dear Jane, I was never more respectful in my life.’

‘Shut up, will you?’

Jane reminded me very much of a woman I had known long before but had never forgotten. Scattered here and there over the globe are a number of lonely Englishwomen, living usually by themselves, some with pensions or small incomes, others living on whatever offers — a strip of land, tutorship, peach farming, all of them thinking of England as home, none of them having the smallest intention of returning there. There are not many of them left; they are a dying race. However, the one I remember best was a lady named Tutina Steele, and she lived at the head of one of the remoter valleys of the Dolomite mountains.

I met Mrs. Steele quite by chance. I was living in a little split-pine *refugio* on the edge of the forest overlooking the valley and had found the place inconvenient in too many respects; for six months in the year there was no water, for instance; the pipes were frozen solid. So I looked about for another dwelling and, across the valley, found a deserted villa standing by itself at the entrance to a lonely canyon known as the Val Lunga. The villa had not been lived in for some time; I peered through the black shutters but could see nothing. The place had a character which I did not like much, but I could not identify the quality at first, so setting aside my vague misgivings I made a few enquiries. Now,

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the people of that valley are Ladins; their language, a Romance language, is the nearest surviving equivalent of the low Latin of a Roman legionary; the valley was invaded and settled at the instigation of the Emperor Tiberius, and the present inhabitants are descendants of those troops. They are a mountain people. Even allowing for their natural reticence, however, I found them curiously reluctant to talk about that particular villa. Under pressure, the proprietor of the local *Gemischtwaren-handlung*, the village grocery store, eventually suggested I should approach Signora Tutina, as she was called.

I had not known till then that there was an English-woman living in the valley. Much interested, therefore, I called one afternoon at the tiny chalet in which she lived, which stood about two hundred yards from the black-shuttered villa. The door was opened by a local woman who evidently was caring for Mrs. Steele till the latter should be well enough to fend for herself as she normally did.

A powerful, rasping voice called: 'Come along in. Pull up a chair. I've broken my blasted leg again.'

She lay on the couch, her leg in plaster. But this was not at all the muscular Amazon the voice led one to expect; on the contrary, Mrs. Steele was painfully thin and fragile, and tiny. Her hair was white; she must have been well over sixty; her wrists were like dried twigs, blue-veined — all her limbs so frail that you thought they must splinter under the least pressure, as in fact they frequently did. The skin on her face was the colour of ivory. But it was her eyes that struck you; they were clear and they were jet black, and just now



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they were hot with impatience of her own helplessness.

'Three times this leg has let me down. Try that chair. I hope you've brought some cigarettes. I've broken a leg every winter for the last three years. I suppose it's to be expected, but my God, it's a bore.'

'How did you manage that?'

'Climbing. Ski-ing, this time. I've broken every bone in my body at one time or another, some of them twice, including the spine. Nora!' she called. 'Tea!'

'Must you climb and ski?'

'I have to make a living somehow, my dear. Besides, I like it.'

'You do it professionally?' I was astounded.

'Why not?'

She had learned to ski at the age of sixty-five and now, when she could find a pupil, she taught ski-ing. A few months later a squad of soldiers was quartered in the village for the purpose of being taught to ski by Mrs. Steele, and occasionally I ran into her on one of the mountainsides leading her flock in a descent. She ski-ed like a maniac, throwing herself down slopes of such precipitancy as would have appalled a man a third of her age and three times her build. She was also a professional guide and rock-climber. In the intervals she ran her own house, baked her own bread, felled her own trees and sawed them into lengths and ran the logs down the mountainside on a *slitta*, there to chop them up for use in her stove.

There was no end to it. She told me some astonishing tales of the Gold Rush of 1898, in which she had taken part with one of her husbands, and several lively

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anecdotes to do with the other four, all of whom she had outlived. I remember, too, that she pulled me up sharply on the score of a technical detail to do with a ship's cable locker, which I happened to have described in a book I lent her. Mrs. Steele was one of the few women to have held a master's ticket in the British merchant navy.

'Well now, what can I do for you?'

I asked her what she knew about the deserted villa.

She smiled. 'Won't they tell you?'

'The villagers? No.'

'I'm not surprised. Very well, give me another cigarette and I'll tell you.' She drew a breath and shifted her leg.

'Well, it happened,' she began, 'just as the war ended. Everything was quiet here. We used to see German transport moving along the road there down in the valley — you can get into Austria over the pass, of course. Anyway, nothing much occurred here till one morning when I was shaking a carpet out on the balcony I noticed somebody moving about on the verandah of the villa — the one you're asking about. You can see it from my window. I watched him for a while and it struck me that I'd seem him before somewhere. His face was familiar. It was what you'd call plump, puffy, white, and he wore a black patch over one eye. I couldn't think who it was for a time. Then it suddenly dawned on me. It was Heinrich Himmler.'

'Who?'

'Himmler. You didn't know he lived here for a couple of weeks, did you?'

'No.'

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'Well, he did — in that villa. The old butcher himself. He was trying to wriggle out of the net then. The Allied armies were moving into Germany from France, so he slipped over the frontier into Italy, and there he was, with about a dozen of his personal body-guard. Several of the boys in the village were shot to keep the rest quiet, so nothing was done about it. That's why they won't talk now. I dare say they feel a little guilty about it. So they should.'

She lighted another cigarette and went on: 'Well, for a few days I watched that verandah, and every morning he would come out and walk up and down, up and down, for hours. They must have spotted me eventually, or perhaps somebody told them there was an Englishwoman next door, for one afternoon a couple of them, hulking louts, came hammering on the door with revolvers in their hands. They gave me five minutes to pack a few things.

"Where am I going?" I asked.

"Germany." That was all. Just: "Germany."

'I knew it was no use arguing with them. So I told them to wait in the hall, which they did, the fools. I popped some things in a rucksack, sneaked downstairs and out by the back door.'

'That was a cool thing to do.'

'Well, you might as well be hanged for a sheep as a lamb, and I knew if I could get into the forest they'd never find me. I was lucky. I walked for two days without a stop, down the valley to Bolzano. By then the road up the valley was solid with German troops and transport, all heading north with the Allied army on its

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heels, shooing them along. The fighting was all over, of course, by then. Still, I kept away from the road till I reached the outskirts of Bolzano, where I found a couple of officers with the leading Allied units.

"Is Himmler any good to you?" I asked them. They looked at me as if I were mad. I suppose I did look a bit of a sight. "He's a mile or two up the road, or was," I said. They didn't believe me. Dolts. But they couldn't get up the road anyway, it was jammed with Germans all the way, all scuttling for Austria. The old devil got away.' She drew on her cigarette. 'He was picked up by a British sergeant a week or two later, wasn't he?'

I saw Mrs. Steele quite often after that. A day or two before I left the valley I met her on the Ciampinoi descent at the foot of a particularly hazardous stretch known locally as The Wall. She was strapped to a sledge which two men were guiding gingerly down the glittering slopes, her face as white as the snow itself.

'Tutina, for God's good sake — what now?'

She let out a groan. 'The blasted thing has let me down again,' she cried. I lit a cigarette for her and watched her go down the mountainside.

Jane in Corumbá was no less cursed, or it might be blest, with a spirit too big for the body it was confined in. She had as yet had no occasion to drive her body till it broke, but she had the same quality of restlessness and impatience. The last time I saw her she was preparing to leave on another trip into the forest.

'When are you going to get tired of this, Jane?'

'I'm tired of it right now.'

'What are you going to do about it?'

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'I'm going back to the States,' she said. 'I've been offered a job in a little country town, and I'm taking it.'

'Good luck to you. What sort of a job?'

'Oh, just in a local library.'

I looked at her. 'Jane.'

'Yep?'

'You don't mean to tell me you're a qualified librarian as well. . . .'

She ran down the steps as the truck pulled up and clambered into the back over the tail-board. Dust enveloped her as the truck bounced away down the road.

I shall always remember of Jane that the only thing about her which was not qualified was her courage. Jane lived valorously.

The manager of the travel agency smiled.

He had sad, bulbous eyes, a moist face and a broad leather belt worn low enough to support his paunch while it also held up his soiled drill trousers. He wore frayed rubber shoes, too, whose laces were always undone, so that as he moved about the tiny metal tips of the laces rattled softly on the floor.

'You would like a ticket to La Paz, *senhor*?'

'If you please.'

'You are aware that you must cross the frontier by road?'

'Fair enough.'

From Corumbá I would travel by road through the forest, and cross the Bolivian frontier to Puerto Suarez, whence a Bolivian airline ran a service to La Paz and other places.

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'For the plane, *senhor*, it is necessary to have a reservation.'

'Then perhaps you will make one for me, for to-morrow.'

He raised his eyes slowly. 'I will try to telephone to Puerto Suarez, *senhor*.'

'Try?'

He moved his sloping shoulders. 'It is difficult.'

'Try — I'll call again this afternoon.'

'By all means.'

I was uneasy, but it passed. I walked down the ramp to the river's edge and stood on the dried mud a few feet from the water and watched the fishermen. Some were far out, in the middle of the heavy brown tide, in their long, slender craft. Their canoes are hollowed tree-trunks and being very narrow and without a keel are easily turned over; on another day I persuaded an Indian to take me out with him in mid-stream, and was relieved to return; so also, I expect, was he, though he remained impassive; had he not kept the dug-out more or less steady with the blade of his paddle, somewhat in the fashion of an Eskimo in his *kayak*, we would both have suffered the dreadful fate of the foolish young man, a dealer in hand-bags from São Paulo, I believe, who ignored warnings and swam in the river a day or two later.

Most of the fishermen were content to paddle about a few yards from the shore where they could catch *piranha*, which, short of anything better, they eat by the dozen; a length of cord and an unbaited hook sufficed very well. The man would then take the snapping, struggling creature by the tail and with it belabour the

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flank of his canoe till the fish was either stunned or dead. The rhythmical thump of fish on hollow timber, not unlike the beat of tom-toms, was audible all over the town during the day, echoing off the wide water.

Witholt, whom I had met on the verandah of the hotel, had told me about a tannery somewhere near the port. He was a tall, lean Dutchman who wore a huge straw Stetson and had an office on the waterfront where he appeared to deal with the town's supply of fuel oil and petrol. I had asked him about the possibility of arranging an *onça* hunt, but he had damped my ardour, being essentially a practical man, on the score of the difficulties. There were jaguars in the swamps to the north, but you needed guides, trained dogs, and any amount of time. If I wanted a pelt, then I could very easily buy one, he suggested, about which I could lie prodigiously as the occasion offered.

The tannery was identifiable by the circle of vultures which hung and swung above its yard and squatted on the crumbling roofs of the neighbouring buildings, for it was in the yard that the dead animals were skinned and the offal left. I went into the dark warehouse. The walls were stacked ceiling high with pelts and skins of every description; alligator hides, stiff as planks, were piled one on the other in heaps. The foreman showed me a jaguar skin about ten feet in length from nose to tail, perforated in one place only, over the heart; but the skin had not been processed and the beautiful head, in which the great yellow teeth still had not been pulled and reset, was alive with flies; to carry it about, or even have it despatched, was out of the question. The cost of the

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skin, as a matter of passing interest, was the equivalent of four pounds sterling.

In the afternoon I went back to the travel agency. 'Did you get a reservation for me?'

The manager shook his head and smiled. 'There is no answer, *senhor*,' he said. 'I have sent a telegram, but there is no answer.' He raised his shoulders.

'Are you likely to get a reply this evening?'

'One never knows. Sometimes they reply.'

'At what time do I leave in the morning if there is an answer?' The agency closed at six; it was then five-forty.

'At eight o'clock, *senhor*.'

'At what time shall I know if you have had a reply?'

'At nine o'clock, *senhor*. We open at nine.'

He raised his mournful mastiff's eyes and made a little gesture of helplessness.

'So even if there is an answer during the night . . .'

His heart bled for me.

'What do we do then?'

He drew convergent lines on a scrap of paper. 'We can send another telegram about another reservation for the following day,' he suggested.

I asked: 'How long can this go on?'

He gazed absently out of the door behind me. 'There are several *cabalheiros* in Corumbá,' he said, 'who found it difficult to get away. They are perfectly happy.'

In the evening I went to the cinema. Altogether I went to the cinema six times in Corumbá, for the cinema showed a different film every night, and the whole town went. The foetor of that horrible little place was inde-



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scribable; still it was somewhere to go, a change of scene; the alternative was to lie on one's bed naked and read, for so long as the mosquitoes permitted. The films were very old, pre-war. One night, during the showing of the advertisement slides which preceded the feature, a cockroach, Wellsian when projected on to the screen, walked across a slide purporting to show the interior of Pedro's commodious saloon, peered over the other edge and then ambled back again, intent on some business of its own. Nothing else happened.

Outside in the street, after the cinema, people stood about in their sodden shirtsleeves to dry a little before going home, but it was almost as hot at ten o'clock at night as it was at midday. The metallic thudding of a samba emanated from the bar that owned a gramophone. The samba is the nearest approach to folk music in Brazil, part Indian, mostly African, and the rhythm is always in the air. I still wake up in the night with that persistent melody in my mind and remember Corumbá.

I was approached by the Dane in the hour before the midday meal, when the glare of the sun off the dusty road was at its most intolerable. He came up the steps, found me in a chair on the verandah, took the adjacent seat and said:

'Excuse me, please. I hear there is an Englishman in town. I must talk to you.'

'Fire away.'

He was a rough-hewn, stocky man of perhaps thirty-three, with sandy hair that fell across his corrugated brow, bushy eyebrows and blue eyes of extraordinary intensity; they glittered and blazed.

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‘What’s the trouble?’ Clearly something was amiss.

‘It’s terrible,’ he began. ‘The most terrible time of my life, sir. I do not speak English, to make you understand.’ As a matter of fact, his hoarse, brutal English was a better vehicle for his story than he knew. ‘Nobody can understand what it has been like, this last three month. The most terrible things that have happened to me. I tell you, I have wanted to die, to be dead, you understand me. For you it is all right — you do not know what people will do to a man in trouble. The most terrible things. Three month I have been wandering in this country, sleeping in the forest at night, begging, with fever and snake bite, without even a gun to keep off the snakes and animals, and starving. Look at my boots.’

‘What happened?’

He passed a hand over his face. ‘I tell you.’ He swallowed and moistened his lips. As he hammered out his bitter tale he thrust his face close to mine as if his words were nails, to be driven home one at a time, and flecks of saliva struck my cheek.

‘Listen. In Santos I miss my ship. I miss it, you understand. I never jump a ship in my life. Never in my life, I swear it. I am late, just a little late, and the ship is gone. Don’t believe I jump a ship. No, sir, I didn’t. I just miss it.’

‘You’re a seaman.’

‘Ja, seaman. So I miss my ship. They don’t wait for me, not even an hour. I know that captain, one day I see that captain again. And there I am in a strange country without money, nothing to eat, no work, nowhere to go. So I go to the Danish consul and what

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does he do? The consul take my passport and will not give it back to me. I have ask, many times, every day. I write letters, I want my passport back, but he will not return it. I get nothing, no money, no help, so I cannot leave the country because I have no papers and I cannot stay because the police put me in prison because I have no papers.'

I asked him why the consul had kept his passport, not because I wished to break down his story, but because I was curious.

'I am nobody. The consul treat me as dirt. I am a seaman who miss his ship, a nuisance, a disease. That is what I have been for three month.' His jaw jutted and his eyes flamed. It struck me suddenly that the light in his eyes was that of ripe lunacy, but I wasn't sure. 'The consul hates me.'

'That's hard to believe.'

'It is true, it is true,' he barked. 'Every word.'

'There must be a good reason.'

'He take my passport and kick me out. I am in trouble because I miss my ship. I did not jump my ship. I am a little late . . .' He went through the story again with minor variations. His face was a few inches from mine all the time. Beads of sweat stood out on his brow and now and then one of them would break free and join another and start a stream of sweat running down into the red stubble on his chin. 'You do not know what people can do to somebody in trouble.' He was rigid.

Probably he had jumped his ship, got involved in a fight and killed somebody—he was quite capable

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of it — and the consul, pending the man's trial or extradition, had obtained his release from gaol but kept the passport as a means of holding the man himself. In the interim he had fled.

'What are you going to do?' I asked him.

'I have to have my papers. A man does not exist unless he has a passport.'

'What's your plan?'

'I go back to Santos. There is the train leaving here tomorrow morning. I jump the train.'

I gave him what he wanted, which was money, and watched him shuffle away down the road.

Two days later, long after the departure of the train, I met him in the street. Quite unabashed, he informed me fully on the subject of the prices and characteristics of the brothel on the outskirts of the town. Probably he is still there, one of the *cabalheiros* who found it difficult to get away.

One afternoon Witholt and I took a boat up the river. Presently the thatched Indian dwellings fell away and then there were alligators on the flats and cayman among the reeds, jaws agape; the cayman is a little smaller than the alligator, having a shorter snout, and less sluggish.

The river narrowed and the reeds and flats gave way to the green walls of the jungle that came down sheer on both banks, impenetrable and silent. Once, where the wall was broken, we ran the boat in and clambered ashore and an alligator stirred resentfully among the dead timber a few feet away and waddled down into the

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water; alligators rarely attack unless they themselves are attacked. It was cool and green-dark in the forest, with something of the atmosphere of a city morgue; you could not see very much or very far, except upwards, up through the fleshy leaves and lianas and strangler-vines to the distant pea-green roof.

On the way back we shot at alligators on the mud flats with an automatic pistol. The eyes are the weak spot in the armour but there was nothing to be gained by blinding the creatures; we contented ourselves with pot-shots at the gnarled backs, from which the bullets ricocheted with a dolorous whine; the target twitched and continued to doze, or flipped his tail and dived. It passed a little more time. That was all I was doing now, and I had become aware of it: I was passing time, keeping not boredom but a growing anxiety at bay. The long, hot afternoon dragged past, till it was time.

The manager did not trouble to raise his head: he knew who it was.

‘Have they replied?’

He raised his head now.

‘Well, how are we doing?’

The sorrowful drooping eyes lingered on my face as if to assess the extent of the resistance that remained. ‘They have not replied, *senhor*. The lines are down. The lines came down in the rains last night.’

I stared at him. ‘Are they working on them?’

‘It is difficult. People steal the wires to make fences with.’ His eyes were a soft rich brown set on a blood-shot yellow.

‘How long will it take, then?’

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'Who knows?' He twitched his shoulders.

'Listen,' I began, 'what happens if I go to Puerto Suarez without a reservation?'

'There would not be a place for you in the plane, *senhor*, and nowhere to stay. You have never been to Puerto Suarez?'

'No, how should I have been?'

'Corumbá, *senhor*, is a place where many of us are content to spend our lives,' he said softly, 'whereas Puerto Suarez . . .'

I remember saying blindly: 'I want to get away from here.'

I did not realise how true it had become till the words were spoken. It was imperative, suddenly, to quit this place for ever. I hated it. Suddenly I was sick of dosing myself with Paludrin, sick of greasing my body with Repellex, sick of lying awake at night listening to the rattle of the rains and the whine of mosquitoes, sick of the decay of the place, its moist fungoid smell, its heat and dust and glare. I was horrified by its furtive aimlessness, its spurious activity, its idiot boy who followed me about, who even now was waiting to pursue me gibbering up the street, to sneak up and show me his captive coin like a grasshopper in a match-box. I was horrified and repelled by the whole God-forgotten place. And above all I hated that damned river flowing past the end of the road, waiting, always there, impervious to anything but itself, heavy, unbearably heavy, laden with its own vile poisons and its abominable fish, brown, tawny, swirling, too lifeless even to glitter in the sun as water should, dense and steaming, like lava.

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'I want to get away from here.'

The manager inclined his head. 'But, of course. We must be patient.'

Nothing strains the stretch of patience so bitterly as to be told one must be patient. It snaps, then, like a violin string, with a twang and a silly flapping of lifeless ends. 'I am being patient!' I said angrily. 'I want a reservation.'

A man entered the agency at that moment and, leaning against the counter, listened. He exchanged a greeting with the manager, who presently sidled away into the office, his shoe-laces tapping on the floor, the rubber soles whimpering faintly.

'You might try without a reservation,' the man said in English.

I asked him where he had learned English.

'I lived twelve years in London,' he said. There was something supremely confident, even triumphant, about his smile. He had dark Middle-European eyes and a brown bald head. Later he told me he came originally from Vienna. I asked him what he was doing in Corumbá.

'Import and export,' he said. He used his smile like a veil.

In the evening while we sipped coffee he was more explicit. 'How do you get your goods to the coast?' I asked him. 'By river steamer?'

He shook his head. 'In my pocket.'

I offered him the question he wanted before he would explain. He produced it like a rabbit from a hat.

'I'm a diamond dealer.'

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I knew there were diamond fields to the north, in the vicinity of a village called, appropriately enough, Diamantino, in whose streams larger and purer diamonds have been found than are mined in South Africa. 'Luxury diamonds?'

'No, no,' he said. 'I don't bother with the luxury trade. Give me industrial diamonds every time.' He seemed so very knowing. Yet he kept his eyes on my face, and there was a quality of uncertainty in them that I don't think he knew was there. Whatever he talked about he was always talking in some sense of himself, with a smiling apperception of his own astuteness, but in his clinging eyes there was a fundamental fear of being found out in some way. 'Tell me,' he said once, 'what does a writer make per year?'

'Very little.'

'You ought to try diamonds.'

'Perhaps so.'

'If ever you come through Rio again, look me up. Come and stay. Any time, any time. People often come and stay for a few days. I have an apartment in Copocabana.'

'You're very kind. You'll be busy.'

'Oh no, not all the time.'

'Won't you be digging up diamonds?'

'Me?' He laughed. 'Not me, old man. I'm a dealer.' Clearly there was some significance in his status which had escaped me. He explained it. 'I buy from the prospectors. There's not much future in digging up gravel in Mato Grosso.' He smiled and shook his head. 'I buy from my prospectors.'



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‘“Your” prospectors?’

‘Well, for instance, a man comes along to me down on his uppers, on the run from the police perhaps, and says will I stake him, lend him money for food and tackle. So I do. It’s a hell of a life with the heat and malaria and insects and one thing or another. Still, that’s what he wants, so I set him up. Then he has to work off his debt, you see?’

‘I think so.’

‘I allow him so much for anything he finds.’

I could imagine how it would go. The dealer would pay the prospector a mere fraction of the true market value of the diamonds, simply by deduction from a standing debt, on which no doubt interest accrued. The prospector was tethered to the bed of his stream by his indebtedness to his patron; certainly he could cut and run, but to whom but another dealer could he sell his finds? It was a living and there was always the hope, the remote, shining hope of a great find, a diamond that would make him rich in a night. On this man’s hope and on his own astuteness the dealer lived, buying diamonds where they were cheap, on the banks of a stream in the swamp, selling them in São Paulo where they would be of great value. It was business, I suppose, and business has its own ethic. We, the rest, have made an ethic of indifference, giving it a positive look, the air of a positive way of living, so man’s abuse of man continues to flourish. I asked the dealer what he had been doing during his twelve years in London.

He answered: ‘I was a psycho-analyst,’ and gave me his sly, knowing smile. I wondered how many tor-

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mented people had placed their souls in that man's hands.

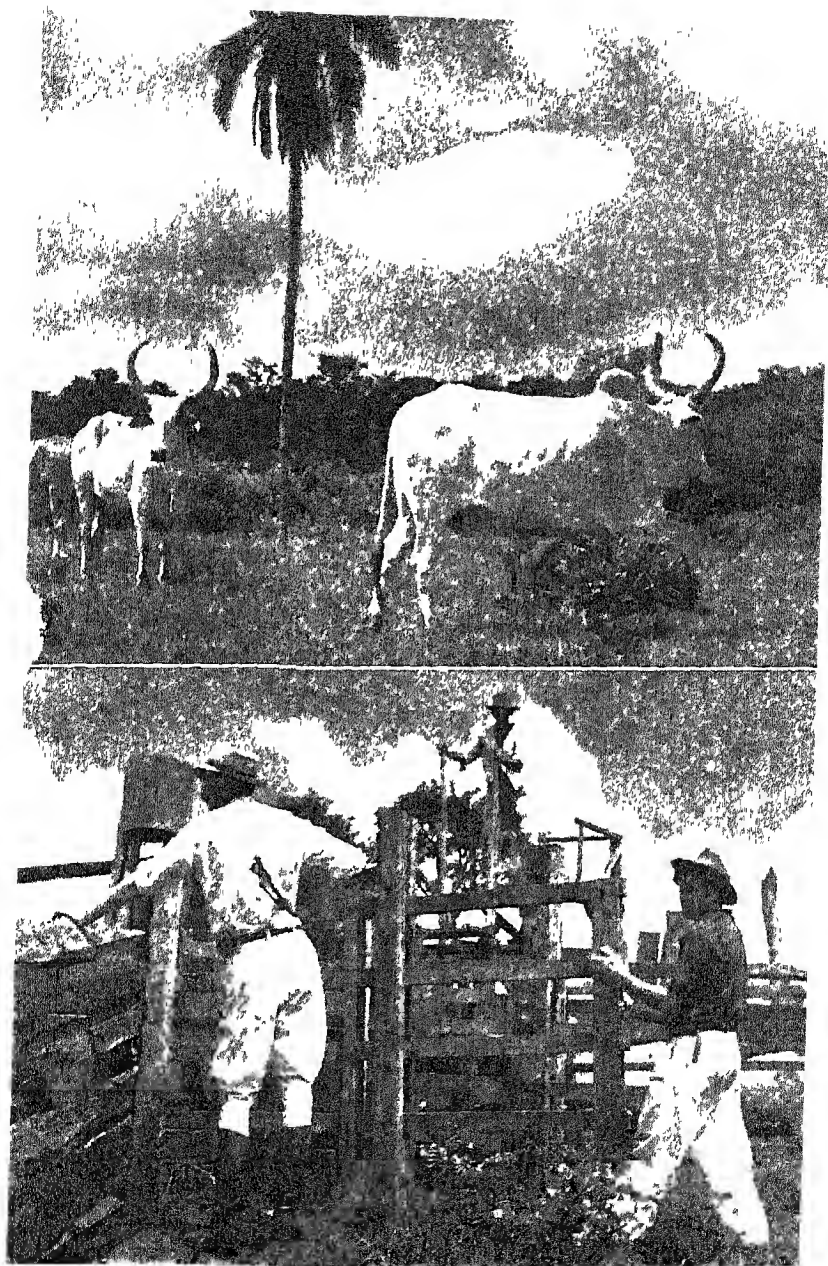
We heard the cry a few minutes later, and there followed the cry an event not easily forgotten. The town was quiet at this hour of the evening, just before the evening meal, and sounds coming off the river at the end of the road were clearly audible. Normally one would have taken no notice of a voice raised along the water front, but this one carried a note of sudden alarm that froze one's bowels. People stopped and looked at one another, and then down the hill. Then there were people running, and distant shouts. We saw only the last sickening moment, from the wall of the ramp above the port.

One of the Indian fishermen was paddling wildly toward the swimmer, shouting to him. The swimmer had realised his danger, had let out a cry and was flailing the water frantically in his effort to reach the river steamer anchored in the roads, but the powerful current was carrying him past it. The queer ruffling of the river's surface, which was a school of *piranha*, was heading straight for him. When the fish reached him he seemed to start waist-high from the water, twisting, and the scream reached us faintly two or three moments later, after he had vanished; there were tiny flashes of silvery light as the fish fought to get at him, and then the arm went under. The fisherman had turned his dug-out about and was paddling slowly towards the shore. I believe it happens fairly often.

In the small hours of the morning I awoke, still bathed in the horror of the dream I had had, in which

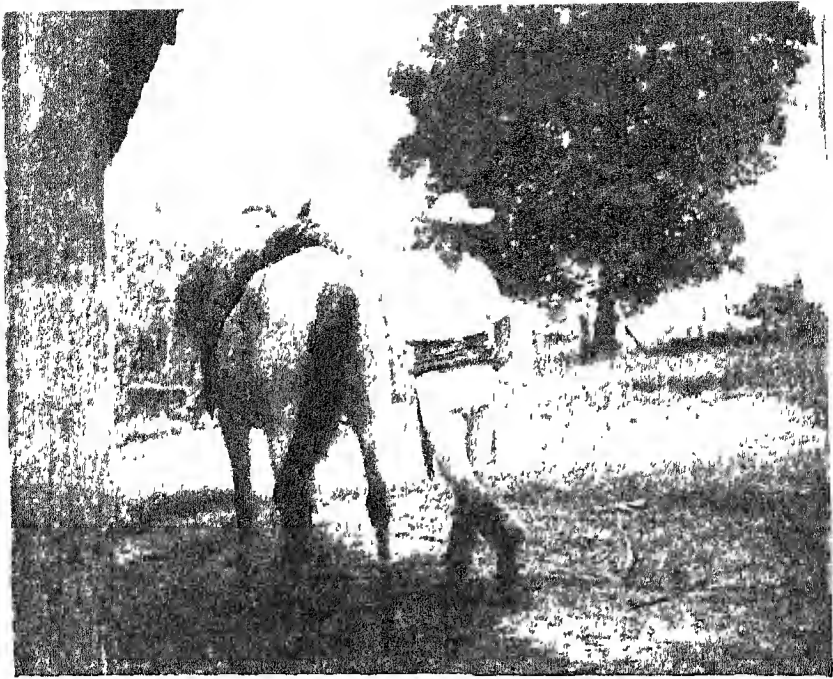
## THE WAY THE WIND BLOWS

nameless shapes rose slowly out of some terrible universal inferno; huge architectural pistons and cranks rose and fell, revolving, grinding against one another, straining, setting up a kind of crepitus, like the juddering within an old ship's hull in a bad sea. I struck a match and lit a cigarette. Somewhere in the room there was a thin metallic tintinnabulation, steady and rhythmical but very slight, hardly audible; after a while I realised it was the bedstead, which was so old and loose that the beating of my own heart started a tiny vibration, which set the knobs tinkling. Presently it began to rain, coming with a rush, and then it was splashing on the window sill. I lay and listened. If the travel agency had been open at that hour I think I would have got up and gone out to buy a ticket, with or without a reservation. In the morning I would buy one, the manager notwithstanding. I hated the man and he hated me. Yet I knew the notion was absurd. He was not really ill-disposed towards me; he was only indifferent: but since I had submitted to the notion that there was no other means of reaching the outer world except by his offices, his indifference had become personal and malign, like that of Kafka's doorkeeper at the door of the Law, who does not prevent the man's entry when he asks it, but only warns him that there are other doorkeepers farther on who may do so: 'Even the third of these has an aspect that even I cannot bear to look at'; so the man sits down to await permission to enter, and he waits all his life outside the door, watching the doorkeeper: 'Every one strives to attain the Law,' he asks as he dies, 'how does it come about, then, that in all these years no one has come seeking admittance



*Above.* ZEBU CATTLE AT RUANA

*Below.* DON RICARDO AND JOHAN AT CERVO, SORTING



*Above.* JOSÉ, AT CERVO

*Below.* TAITT, AT RUANA



THE ROOFS OF CUZCO



QUECHUA WOMAN, CUZCO

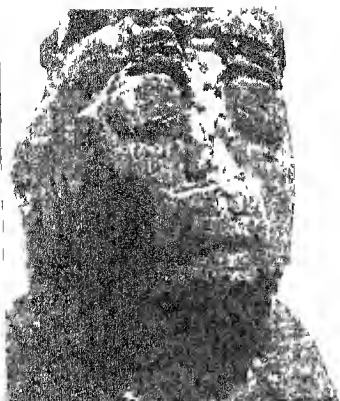


CHOLA  
WITH BABY,  
THE MARKET,  
LA PAZ



A BEGGAR,  
LA PAZ

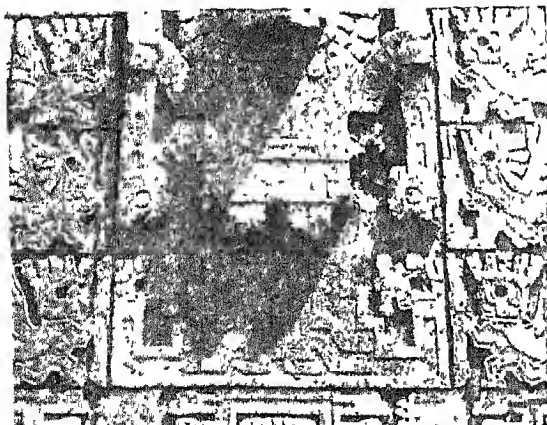
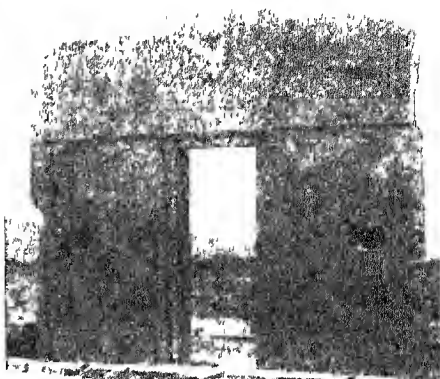




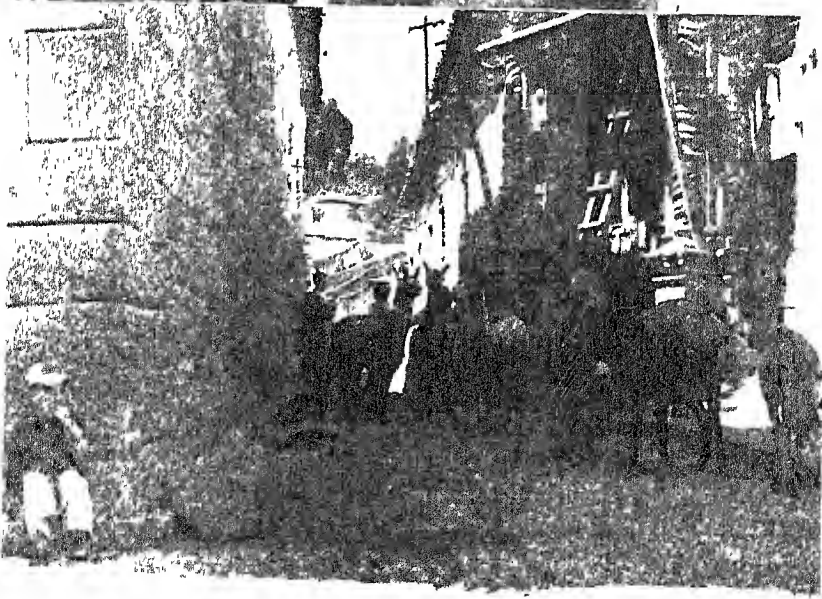
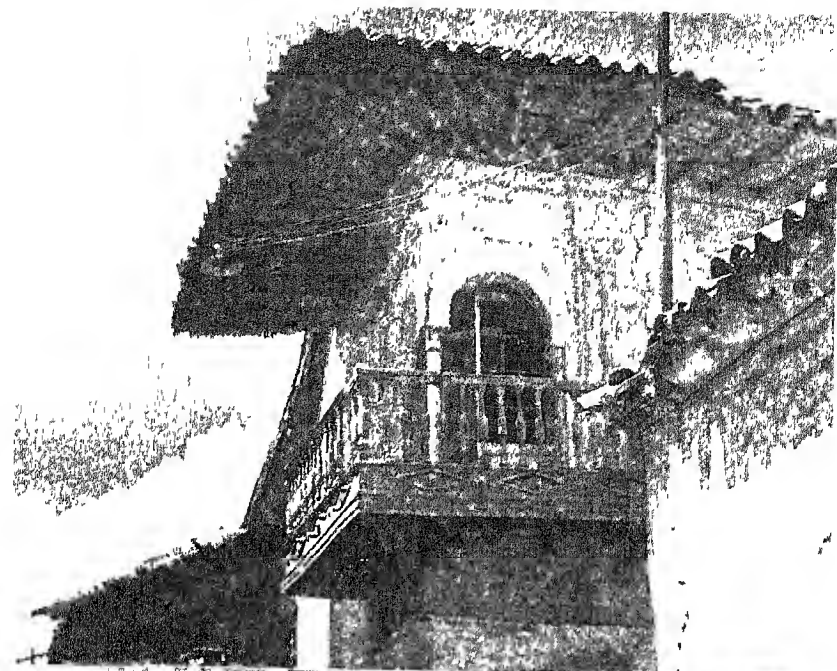
## *TIAHUANACU*

THE BISHOP

THE GATE OF THE SUN



DETAIL OF THE GATE



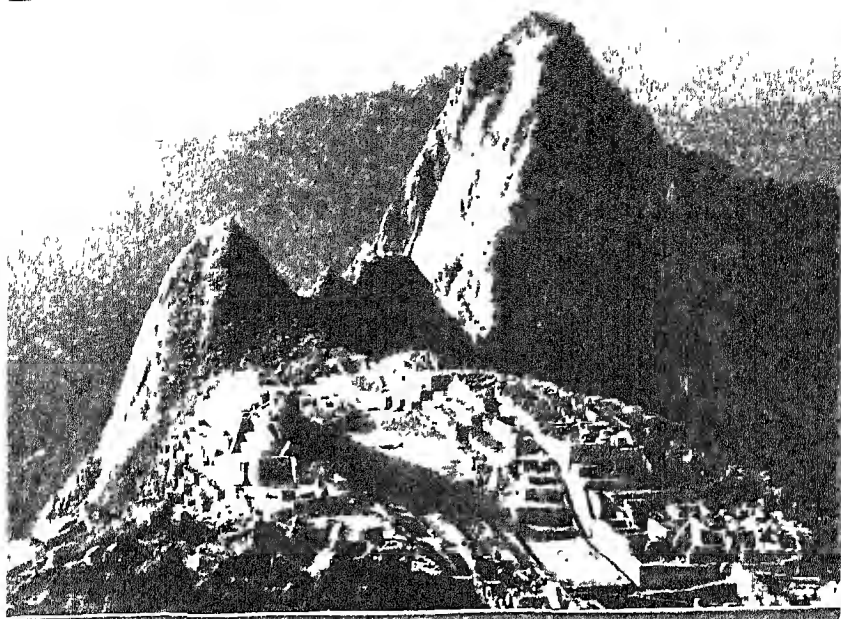
*Above:* CUZCO; A SPANISH DWELLING BUILT ON INCAIC FOUNDATIONS

*Below:* THE FOUNDATIONS; A LLAMA TRAIN



*Above* : IN CUZCO ; THE WALLS OF CORICANCHA IN THE BACKGROUND

*Below* : A SHOP

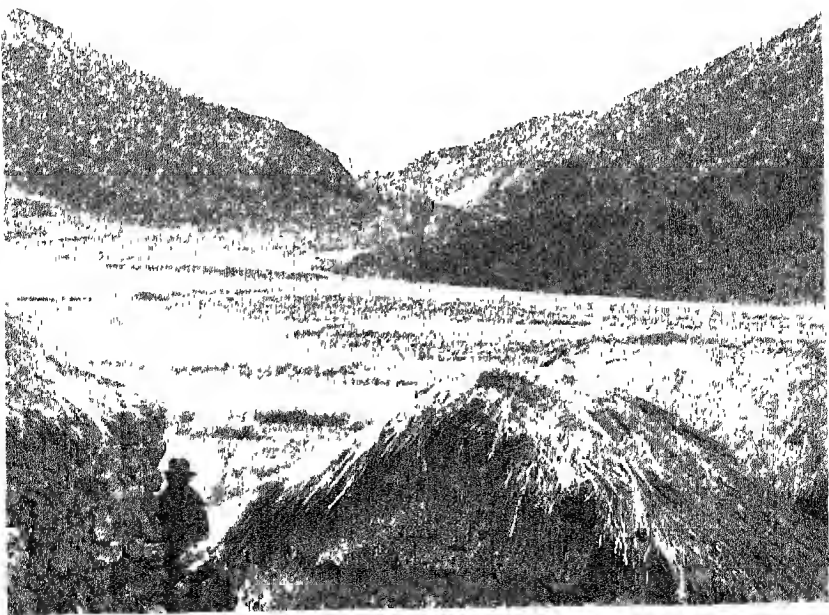


*Above: THE 'LOST CITY' CALLED MACHU PICCHU, THE TERRACING ON THE SUMMIT OF HUAYNA PICCHU CAN BE SEEN*



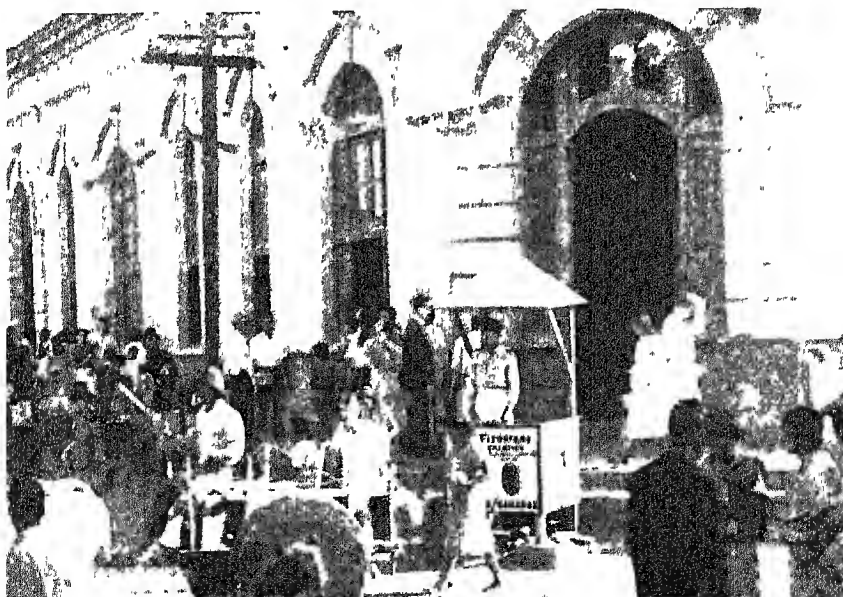
*Above* THE FORTRESS OF SACSABUAMANA, CUZCO

*Below* THE KNOT OF VILCAÑOTA, PERU, TAKEN FROM THE TRAIN

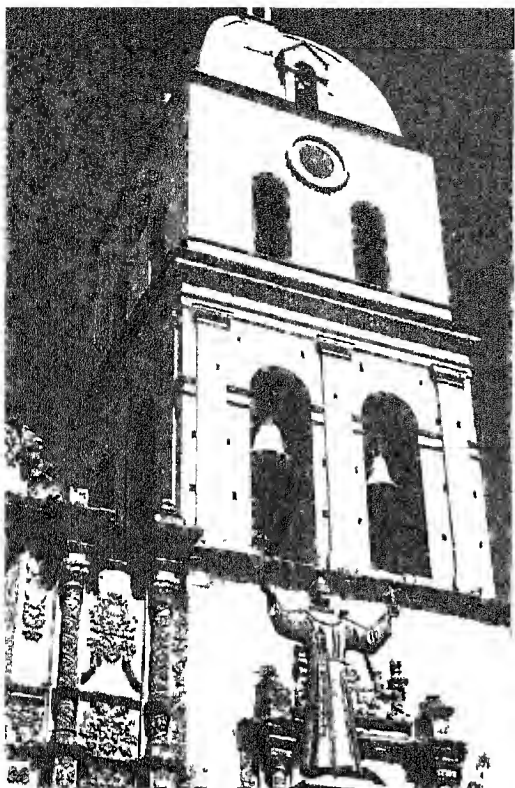




*Above* A STREET IN SANTA CRUZ DE LA SIERRA, BOLIVIA  
*Below* THE CENTRE OF THINGS, SANTA CRUZ



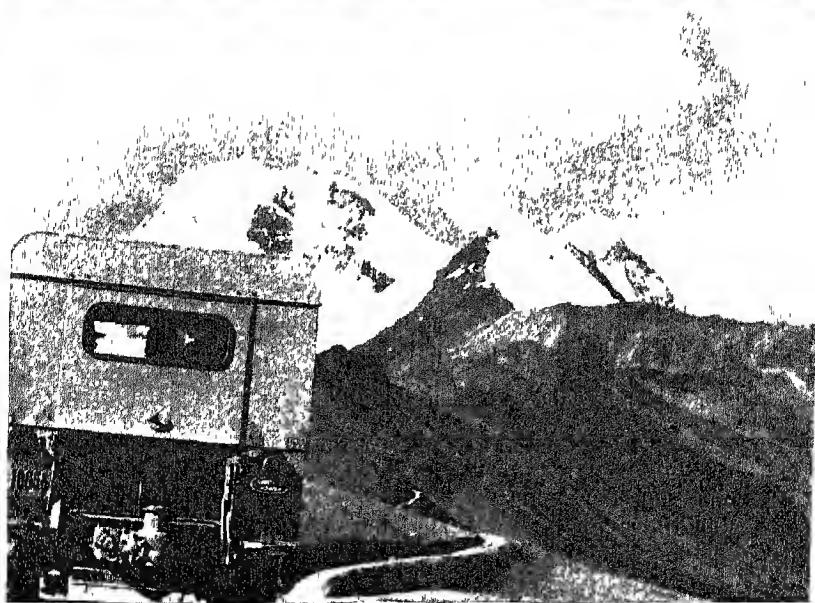




BELFRY OF THE CHURCH  
OF SAN FRANCISCO,  
LA PAZ



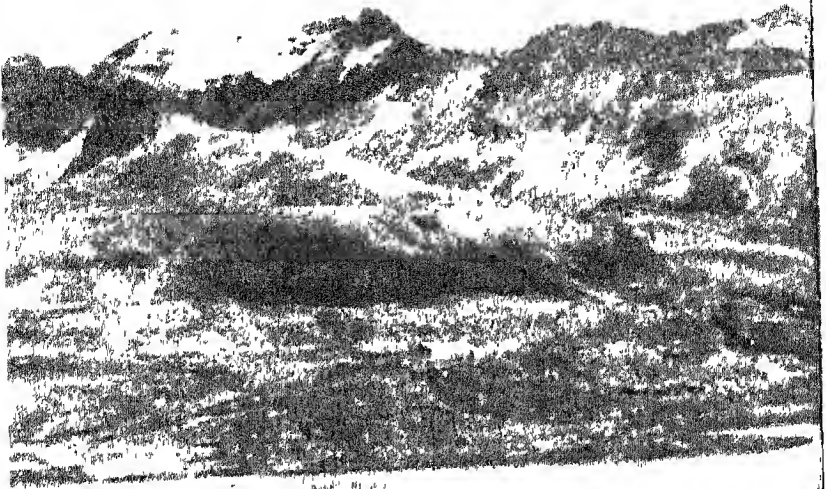
OUTSIDE LA PAZ,  
A MARKET



*Above.* THE WAY TO FABULOSA

*Below:* THE VICE-CHAIRMAN'S ROAD, ALT. 18,000 FT.





*Above:* FABULOSA: THE MINE IS VISIBLE ON THE RIGHT

*Below:* A GATHERING OF AYMARA INDIANS



*Above . AT CERVO*  
*Below . ANT-EATER*



*Above: THE BANKS OF THE PARAGUAY RIVER AT CORUMBÁ*

*Below: FISHING FOR PIRANHA AT CORUMBÁ*

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but me?' The doorkeeper answers: 'No one but you could gain admittance through this door, since the door is intended only for you. I am now going to shut it.'

In the morning I bought a ticket.

A LITTLE after dawn on the seventh day I set out for Puerto Suarez. As Corumbá fell away behind, my spirits grew correspondingly lighter. The escape perhaps was only temporary: no matter, the nightmare was ended at least for a few hours. The vehicle, a scarred pre-war Ford, ground along the track toward the forest. Where the track was particularly rough the front mudguards flapped up and down like the wings of some senile old vulture trying hopelessly to gather sufficient speed to take off. In the back seat the small dark man with sparse dishevelled hair and glasses, with whom I was sharing the taxi, who had a bag across his diminutive knees, bounced decorously up and down, and beneath his backside the springs struck a series of sonorous chords. From time to time he adjusted his glasses and peered out of the window as we approached the forest.

I asked him presently in my execrable Portuguese whether he planned to travel by the same plane.

‘No,’ he answered in an English very nearly as bad, ‘no, I stay in Puerto Suarez a few hours.’

‘That’s hard luck. I hear it’s a dreadful hole.’

‘For me — good. The worst teeth I have ever known are in Puerto Suarez.’

I turned and looked at him.

‘I am a dentist,’ he said happily. ‘Dentist,’ he repeated, believing I had not understood. ‘Dentist from Prague.’

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He opened his mouth and pointed to it and gnashed his teeth. 'Tooth,' he said. '*Zahn* . . .' He lifted the bag on his knees and shook it; it gave off a loud jingle of instruments.

I tried hard to accept it all. 'You have a practice here?'

'Oh, *ja*.'

'Really? Where?'

'Brazil and Bolivia.'

I had begun to laugh, perhaps with a touch of hysteria, to myself. To be riding into the Gran Chaco in a taxi was splendid; to be doing so with an itinerant dentist from Prague was letting down the Royal Geographical Society in a manner which, had I been a member, would have led to outraged expulsion. The dentist bounced up and down and the seat twanged.

'That's a considerable practice,' I suggested.

'*Ja*, I travel everywhere.'

'You go from one place to another pulling out teeth.'

'*Ja*, just pull out teeth.'

'Don't you ever stop them?'

'*Ja*, I stop wherever there is teeth to be pulled out.'

I wept into my handkerchief so that he should not see and perhaps take offence. Lord, what a lovely thing is life, I reflected. Already she was lifting her preposterous head again, and today she wore the face of a clown. But the morning had hardly begun. The mudguards flapped, the springs twanged, the instruments in the bag jingled musically. We drove on toward the Bolivian frontier. The earth was bathed in dew and smelled sweetly, the grasses waved, the shadows were still long

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and cool in the dawn. We came into the forest and the sun flashed on a leaf.

We debouched from the green tunnel. The track unwound ahead of us. The country was still wooded, but there was air and light and shafts of sunlight fell aslant our path through the timber.

The man was perhaps a hundred yards away, ambling along the track, swinging the bloodied strips of meat on a length of cord in his hand. He was immensely fat, with a huge belly that caused him to roll as he walked. He wore a soiled white singlet, drill trousers, and on his head a dirty white yachting cap. He might have been strolling along the water-front of Marseilles.

The driver pulled up alongside and there was an exchange of greetings; evidently they were all known to one another. He climbed into the back seat with the dentist.

'*Olà*,' he grunted, and looked at the floor of the taxi between his feet.

Blood dripped from the meat to the floor. He considered it for a moment. Then he heaved his great bulk to the edge of the seat and, hoisting the meat out of the window, sat there, his trousers tight about his vast thighs, with the meat suspended from his hand. It appeared he had taken a walk in the forest to see if his traps had produced a breakfast, and they had; it hung from the string.

'*Obrigado*,' he said to the driver.

'*Nada*,' the driver said.

We started off again. The fat man tipped his yacht-

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ing cap back from his brow, scratched the stubble on his chins and observed that it was a fine morning. We all agreed.

‘How far is it to the frontier?’ I asked.

They came to the conclusion presently that it was a matter of minutes.

‘Are the customs people difficult here?’ I enquired. I had in mind my camera; there was also an automatic pistol in my suitcase which I had bought in London, having been warned to expect a revolution in Bolivia in the near future.

In the taxi nobody spoke for a moment. The fat man eyed me with a glint of humour in his small black eyes. The dentist cleared his throat, the driver grinned at the road. I noticed these reactions but they signified nothing; it was an excellent morning and all was well.

‘It depends what you call difficult,’ the fat man said at last.

‘Your arm must be tired,’ the dentist said.

‘No, no, it is very well.’ To me he said: ‘It depends what you mean by difficult.’

‘Let us change sides,’ the dentist said.

‘I have one or two things . . .’ I began.

‘Stop,’ the dentist said abruptly. ‘We will change positions. But I insist.’

The car drew up. The dentist and the fat man got out, walked round the back of the vehicle and each got in again at the other side. The bleeding meat was suspended from the other window. My enquiry was forgotten. We went on for an hour, towards the frontier.

Then we rounded a bend in the track, ground up an



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incline and came into a sunlit clearing. Across the middle of the clearing there was a primitive barbed wire fence; on the right, beneath the trees, stood the customs house, a small wooden hut; another lay on the left beyond the wire fence, in Bolivia.

‘The frontier,’ the dentist announced.

The fat man alighted with a sigh and shambled away round the back of the hut, while on its verandah there appeared an individual of swarthy complexion wearing one of the illest-fitting uniforms I have ever seen; he wore breeches but no boots or puttees, bore what appeared to be a rusty fowling-piece on his narrow shoulder and plainly took his duties with dignity and gravity. He approached the car and poked his head through the window.

‘Passport,’ he said.

I gave him my passport. He looked at it blankly, taken aback, evidently, that his enquiry should have elicited a response at all. Hoisting the flintlock on to the other shoulder he flicked through the pages of the passport with lively interest.

‘Which is the *visa*?’ he asked in a moment.

‘Out of Brazil? Or into it? Or into Bolivia?’

For a moment he ruminated.

‘Exit or entry?’ I ventured.

‘Just the *visa*,’ he said, nodding.

I found a *visa* and pointed to it.

‘Is that it?’ he said, astonished. ‘What’s it say?’

I looked at him. ‘But can’t you read?’

‘No, *senhor*.’

‘You’re a passport official,’ I said, ‘and you can’t read?’

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'If I could read, he *senhor*,' replied tartly, 'I would not be a passport official.'

Not unaware that he had scored a point he then suggested I should open my baggage for inspection by the customs authorities. We gathered about the boot of the car and I unlocked my suitcase. We stood back. He shuffled his feet in the dust, shifted the flintlock to the other shoulder, and pronounced: 'Attentions for the customs examination.'

Hitching up his trousers, bulking big in the sun, the fat man himself came majestically down the steps.

'Great God,' I whispered to the dentist, 'is he the customs man?'

The dentist raised his shoulders helplessly and nodded. 'I tried to warn you. . . .' The man looked me in the eye without flicking an eyelash and bent over my guilty belongings. His hands burrowed deftly beneath the surface. Quite certainly they found the camera, and then the gun, but his face remained impassive. 'Close,' he grunted, and scrawled on the leather with a bit of chalk.

'*Telogo, senhor*.' He nodded and turned and went back to his breakfast.

We drove on through the woods to Puerto Suarez. It was a mere huddle of crumbling dwellings, thatched for the most part, even the thatch being riddled with holes, set about a dusty track in the sun. An old Indian woman picked a pile of rotting garbage; nothing else moved, no children, no dogs, no chickens. Only the creeping desolation seemed active. The bumble of the car's engine echoed from the walls as we drove along the track.

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The contrast between Brazil and Bolivia was so immediate and so striking that I set my own impressions aside as being too hastily arrived at, or wrong. But it was a true one; I saw no reason to modify it much in the weeks that followed. The vitality and the force which you feel in Brazil, even though it is confused and apparently without a sense of direction, is missing in Bolivia. In Brazil the heart is young and strong and charged with hope; in this other land, Bolivar's great mistake, there is no pulse at all, for it was still-born. Without a coastline, cut off from the Pacific by the Andean barrier 400 miles wide, barred from the Atlantic by 1500 miles of trackless forest and plain, it lies in the body of South America like an area of dead flesh. But this I did not know then. I knew only that if there were no seat on the plane I would have to spend as long in Puerto Suarez as I had spent in Corumbá, and the prospect was not an inviting one. We drove on.

The air station was unexpectedly, pathetically modern. It stood by itself, grotesquely out of place, on the edge of a clearing in the woods where the airstrip lay, and but for an Indian woman squatting among the tubular furniture suckling her child at a breast like a dried leaf, was quite empty. Outside I heard the car draw away; the driver said he would return later to confirm my departure, but I doubted whether he would. With a little searching I found an official and put to him my question:

'Is there a seat on the plane?'

He said: 'Have you a reservation, *señor*?'

'I'm afraid not.'

He shrugged. 'You'd better ask the pilot.'

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So I went out into the sun and sat on a wall. Huge, gay butterflies hovered over the thin brown turf. After a time a small boy was sent out on to the strip to chase away the goats that were grazing there. This he did three times, till the plane came in and touched down.

I walked out to meet the pilot, who was strolling across the field towards the office. He was a North American with grey hair and a boy's face, and he was very surprised to come upon a stray Englishman in that place. He was the last of the doorkeepers.

'Have you room for one?'

'Sure,' he said, taken aback, 'the plane's empty. Hop in, it's all yours.'



PART TWO  
FABULOSA

## I

THE forests and lowlands of eastern Bolivia are one of the most unaccommodating bits of country the earth has to offer. The flight over this territory, from Puerto Suarez to Santa Cruz de la Sierra, is known to the pilots of the air service as the Milk Run, principally on account of the number of stops the plane makes, despite the inhospitality of the country and the sparseness of its population; in Europe the air services are supplementary to rail and road travel — something of a luxury still; it takes one a little time to realise that in central South America the opposite is the case: the airplane performs the same service as would the local rural railway, if there were one. In this instance there isn't; a road has been started from Puerto Suarez westwards to rescue Santa Cruz from its present isolation in this torrid wilderness, and another from Santa Cruz to rescue Puerto Suarez, but the twain have not yet met. There is also a railroad, whose motives are similar, but it, too, peters out in the jungle some two hundred miles short of its target.

I would have liked to make the journey by mule, with a sociable guide and sufficient equipment; I dare say it could be done by jeep, as a matter of fact. The reason I did not try it was exquisitely simple: I hadn't enough money. It was not the idea of discomfort that precluded the venture. I have always found it hard to be tolerant of travellers who loudly lament the absence

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of bathrooms and iced drinks in remote places; there is a breed of long-distance tourist who appears to travel only for the pleasure of making embittered comparisons with the degree of civilisation he enjoys at home, and who sets to his personal credit the fact that his own country is by an act of God very much richer in natural resources and rather farther from the equator than, for example, Bolivia. He does his own country immeasurable harm, for it is an unfortunate truth, having its roots deep in human nature, that while good behaviour on the part of the majority is taken for granted, bad behaviour on the part of the few is taken as quite, quite typical. No doubt in his own surroundings the man is kindly and tolerant. Outside them, however, he makes himself and his hosts very unhappy, and is moreover a prodigious bore. On one occasion I was emphatically advised by such a party not on any account to go to Cuzco, capital of the ancient Inca empire, because of the smells with which that town abounds. In a way I was grateful, for his warning drew my attention to an aspect of Cuzco, one of the most fascinating places it has been my good luck to see, which otherwise I would not have remarked, namely, the wonderful variety of its effluvia — effluvia of such richness, such rarity, such impact, that one was enabled to appreciate the place sensually as well as intellectually, as indeed one should.

From Puerto Suarez, then, we flew north-west at a few hundred feet above the carpet of the jungle, pitching and rolling as the earth beneath changed from forest to swamp and swamp to bone-dry desert. We landed, for



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no reason that I could see, on an airstrip called Roboré. From Roboré we turned south-west to San José, and then north-west again to San Ignacio; from the airstrip at San Ignacio you could see, far to the north, the dim blue outline of the Ricardo Franco hills — the plateau of Conan Doyle's *Lost World*. Due west, then, to Concepción, though it might just as well have been any other such place: they all looked exactly alike. Each was a clearing in the bush, burned brown by the sun, shimmering in the heat, marked by a small building which was the air station, and by a motionless windsock on a pole.

As the plane came to a standstill and the rumble of the engines died away, an Indian wearing a vast straw hat ambled out of the shade of the building pushing a mobile landing-stage. But then the sun struck the aircraft like a flame. Airborne, the interior was pleasantly cool; once at rest, however, the heat in the cabin became quite unbearable; the thin shining metal ticked in the silence as it began to expand; you sat and panted, sweat running from every pore. After the first two halts I took to getting out into the glare and the drone of insects to stand under the wing with the crew, where at least there was shade. One or two Indians embarked, a few would get out; often nobody did either.

I wandered across the field to the station once or twice, for here in Bolivia certain airstrips used by Panagra, the North American line, were graced with a small, painted notice-board telling the traveller where he was, at what altitude the place stood, how far it was to La Paz, when the airport was built and by whom. The custom reminded me of the similar passion for statistics

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demonstrated by the engineers of the Fifth Army in Italy; they, too, gave their Bailey bridges names and added some interesting footnotes. There were several such bridges over the Volturno, I remember, each bearing a painted board with some such legend as: *The Franklin D. Roosevelt Bridge. This bridge contains more angles (or struts, or bolts) than any bridge ever built. Built by the 24th Engineer Company, U.S. Army.* A mile or so along the river bank there was another, and then others, each vying with its neighbours, rising eventually to a truly resounding climax: *The George Washington Bridge. This bridge contains more screws and was erected in less time than any bridge in the history of the world.*

It was all very impressive. Driving on down the river into the British sector, however, with whose engineers there was an amiable rivalry, one noticed, adjacent to the first bridge, a scrap of rain-soaked paper pinned to a plank. In very small, blurred typescript it bore the sardonic legend: *There is nothing at all remarkable about this bridge.*

We reached Santa Cruz in the afternoon. The town's taxis had either broken down or were all engaged. I found a boy with a small cart pulled by a donkey, hoisted my baggage into it and followed them along the track into the town.

The hotel stood in a side-street near the principal square. It was old and gaunt and, like much else in Santa Cruz, gave the impression that it was only temporarily a hotel and tomorrow would be something else, a police barracks perhaps, or a tannery, or just another ruin. It interrupted the proprietor's sleep, deposited my belong-

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ings in the naked little room he allotted to me, and went out.

Now in the evening sunlight the seedy town, unlovely at the best of times, wore an aspect of jaded debauchery. The roads are unsurfaced, a mixture of sand and dust, trampled and rutted. The buildings, lurching over the ox-carts and horsemen and stout *cholas* who squat in the shade selling vegetables, each contribute a few yards of elevated sidewalk above the road, so there is somewhere to walk other than ankle-deep in dust. Where two roads crossed there was a policeman on point duty in a small white kiosk, looking exactly like an ice-cream vendor; the solid wheel ox-carts and horsemen padded on their way irrespective of his noble flourishes.

Santa Cruz was roughly the eastern limit of Incaic penetration. Later it was occupied by the Spaniards, who built an overblown cathedral in the square and used the town chiefly as a clearing-house for contraband. The two main reasons for the growth of illicit trade in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries are rather intriguing. The first was that Philip II of Spain taxed the legal exchange of goods in and out of his colonial possessions to such a tune that his loyal subjects were obliged to resort to illegal commerce which, instead of passing northwards through the usual channels to Panama, or across Colombia to Barranquilla, was covertly shipped in the opposite direction, which was, down the River Plate system to the then new city of Buenos Aires; the goods sometimes passed through Santa Cruz de la Sierra. The second reason, equally sound, was that too great a proportion of legally consigned goods and gold was being lost to the pirates

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of the Caribbean. When it was known that Drake was in the Atlantic, no Spanish galleon would put to sea in either direction. Buenos Aires was well off his beaten track.

I was sitting in an eating-house that evening when three men at a neighbouring table, who had been watching me speculatively for some time, asked me to join them. One was a young Bolivian, an officer in the army; the other two, one British, one North American, were business men from La Paz. They asked me what I was doing in Santa Cruz and I told them. 'Just having a look round.' I could not have been more truthful.

But my answer was greeted with wreathed smiles. It was not the first time, nor the last, that I found my mild adventure was suspect.

'I can imagine,' one of them said dryly.

Clearly I was bogus. I was the agent of a foreign power. MI5 was up to its old tricks again. I protested my innocence in vain.

'Perfectly all right, old man, you can trust us, you know, not a word to a soul. Now, what's in the wind?'

Further protestations only heightened their respect for, or irritation with, my professional discretion. We all grew a little vexed with one another.

After dinner we stumbled along a track through the moonlit woods to a place where George, the North American, assured us there would be music and dancing but which, as it transpired, was a brothel. Here we sat gingerly on the hammocks slung across the dim interior of a cottage and waited for the music and dancing. I confirmed my companions' suspicions by asking at this

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point about the possibilities of another revolution in Bolivia. They were mines of confidential information on the subject. We sat on the hammocks in the empty brothel and discussed the political situation. Meanwhile the withered, glassy-eyed *chola* who ran the place had dispatched a boy into Santa Cruz to round up *les girls* for our entertainment, and presently she informed us to this effect.

‘What, no music?’ George said. ‘What the hell sort of a place is this anyway?’

Mama told him. We declined her hospitality and left; she shrugged, popped another coca pellet into her mouth and went back to bed.

At four o’clock on the following morning I was awakened in order that I should catch the plane that left at eight o’clock. The airport tumbril waited outside. In parenthesis, it would be interesting to know why airlines take so malevolent a delight in causing their patrons the maximum of inconvenience in this way, as they universally do, each petty official in the chain of command deducting fifteen minutes from the time of departure of the plane to give himself a little extra time in which to tick off one’s name on the manifest, or weigh one’s baggage, or drive the coach to the airport, with the inevitable upshot that the wretched passenger is left to grind his teeth for an hour or more in a draughty waiting-room. I have never known it not happen.

I arrived at the airport two hours too soon, found a small restaurant in the building and sat down to order some breakfast. Presently I was joined by a young man with fair hair, quixotic brown eyes and a satanic smile who, he informed me, was the official in charge of freight.

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'Are you fond of animals?' he asked me after a while.

'Passably. Why?'

'I've got a tapir.'

'Really?'

'Like to see it?'

We finished the meal and went out into the bright sunshine. He led the way across an area of waste land behind the air station toward a couple of wrecked farm carts. There beneath them, blinking placidly in the dewy morning, was a young tapir about the size and build of a well-developed pig, grey in colour, with small eyes and ears and a long, drooping, moist proboscis. Its tether was a length of lavatory chain attached to the wheel of one of the carts.

'Pretty, isn't he?'

'Beautiful.'

'Sort of solid.'

'Where did you get him?'

'Around. Lost his mother, I guess.'

'Seems quite tame.'

'Oh, he is. Comes when you call him.'

'What's his name?'

'Norman, I call him, after my brother.' He ran the tips of his fingers down the repulsive proboscis. 'Sort of gives you something to think about, in this place.'

'Is that chain strong enough?'

'No. He gets free sometimes and wanders into the station when there's a rush on. You ought to see that.'

'I'd like to.'

'Why don't you stay a couple of days? Maybe he'll break free.'

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'Well,' I said, 'the thing about a journey of this kind is that if you don't keep moving you develop a conscience about it.'

'I know what you mean.' He patted the tapir. 'Good boy.'

We went back into the station and he went about his business.

The little hall filled rapidly. Indians and whites jostled about the reception counter buying tickets and confirming that their names appeared on the manifests; others argued over the customs benches; a shoe-shine boy called his trade; a plane came in and its passengers joined the throng. It is scarcely necessary to describe the creature's entry. I did not see it till the man fell headlong and the woman screamed. Two or three *cholo* porters, evidently accustomed to the tapir's occasional appearances, grappled delightedly with it; it had slipped its collar, however, and there was nothing but the abbreviated tail by which to grasp it. It lifted a pink maw, uttered a shrill bellow, and bolted. Several more women screamed, there was a good deal of shouting of instructions, and the freight manager, appearing at my side, said gravely:

'I thought maybe you'd just like to see the sort of effect it has.'

I thanked him warmly.

But he watched with dissatisfaction. 'It's better than this usually,' he said. 'Much better.' He sighed and went after his beloved pet, the collar and chain dangling from his hand.

Now for the first time in the remote distance were the peaks of the Cordillera, unbelievably white against

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the blue-black sky. The tawny earth climbed steadily, utterly barren, riven by stony valleys, green-veined where a stream ran along the floor of a crevice. On the naked hillsides there were traces of Incaic terracing, like ribs in the body of a dead world. Cochabamba lies at an altitude of about 8000 feet and when we touched down I was cool for the first time in three months.

For much of their immense length the Andes are divided into two ranges, running more or less parallel, known as the Eastern and Western Cordilleras; at their widest, in Bolivia and Peru, they form a barrier some 400 miles across. Joining the two principal masses there are a series of smaller ridges, like the rungs of a ladder, and between the rungs lie shallow basins and plateaux, often very fertile. Cochabamba stands among the foothills of the Eastern Cordillera. The air is clean and pure and the neighbouring peaks seem hardly more than a few hundred yards away across the green hills.

The frightful poverty of Bolivia is less oppressive in Cochabamba than elsewhere because the town is able to feed and support itself and so does not suffer from the crippling lack of communications that is one of the blights of this miserable land. The sullen discontent that characterises the Indian of the higher altitudes is less apparent. Yet it is in Cochabamba that the majority of Bolivian revolutions begin; there have been a hundred and thirty-odd in the last hundred years; and the reason is that the Indian of the lower altitudes, better fed, less stupefied by coca and correspondingly more spirited, is a much more political creature; from time to time he insists on his rights.

I had been warned that I was running into another



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revolution, and while I did not particularly wish to see the president suspended from a lamp-post, to have experienced Bolivian politics in action might have been illuminating. But Cochabamba was peaceful to the point of dullness. I wandered about the shady cobbled streets and sat in the plaza. There were a number of churches of Spanish origin to look at, lusciously baroque, containing some undistinguished murals painted, so I was informed, by Indian artists of local Spanish schools. Spanish destruction of the Incas' own culture was as complete as it was of the rest of the splendid civilisation they found here; little is left but the story.

The most striking phenomena of the streets of every town in Bolivia are the *cholas* — women of mixed blood, mostly Indian. The men-folk are rather drab of aspect and furtive of manner; the women are a delight. Their faces are round and brown, their teeth white, their eyes black and full of humour. They dress, moreover, with a rich insouciance and a love of colour that is breath-taking, piling skirt upon skirt, each of a different hue, all so short that their muscular brown legs are bare from knee to foot. On their backs they carry their children in a brightly striped shawl, hand-woven and of ancient design, or, if they have no child, then the shawl bulges with goods for sale in the markets. Their hair is blue-black, glossy, and is worn plaited and tied with ribbons. On the summit of this odd creature a hat sits; in La Paz it is a bowler, usually too small, rakishly tilted. It is said that the fashion was imported into Bolivia by an Italian hat salesman; if so, then he brought off a miracle of salesmanship, for the hat offers no protection against

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wind, rain or sun, blows off at a puff, and is charming only for its absurdity. Each town has its own style of headgear, however. In Cochabamba they wear instead a tall, conical panama with straight wide brims rather like the traditional hat of Wales. So they plod about their business, always with a slight forward stoop which, arising from the habit of carrying everything on their backs, gives them a dogged, patient, peaceful aspect. As it happens, they are anything but peaceful, for they greatly enjoy a revolution, are capable of appalling savagery, and with their long silver shawl pins have added some interesting forms of torture to the waging of civil war.

In the evening I enquired after a place where one might dine well in pleasant surroundings and was directed to a restaurant called Cortija, lying somewhat out of the town.

After a drive of twenty minutes or more along a track across the hills I was set down at a door in a wall, over which a light hung. I had not the smallest notion where I was. However, there was a bell. Presently the door was opened and a porter directed me through what appeared to be an elaborate landscape garden toward a distant glow of light.

Cortija is an open-air night club and the handsomest place of its kind I have ever seen. The Tropicana night club in Havana, which claims, I believe, to be the finest of its kind in the world, is a dispirited, down-at-heels affair by comparison with this place in eastern Bolivia.

For here is a swimming pool among flowering trees beneath the stars, subtly lighted from below the clear water's level, marbled, its diving-boards etched ivory-

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white against the sky. There are secret *patios* under the vines set with white hide chairs and couches and the tinkle of small fountains. There is a restaurant furnished by a man who could afford to discard his mistakes and begin again. There is a dance floor that rolls underfoot like the surface of a calm sea, set about with chairs designed for comfort as well as beauty, and tables hewn in one piece from the trunks of rare trees. And there is a bar, a bar designed for drinking and the casual meal, well-lit, alive with the glitter of crystal glasses and the sheen of bottles whose labels were printed long ago in France and on the Rhine and in Tuscany. The bar was like a window in the wall of the night.

But the really unique aspect of the place lay in something other than its bogus luxury. It lay in the fact that except for myself it was quite empty. There were waiters and stewards in immaculate white jackets, the lights were lit, the fountains played, everything was in perfect order. And it was empty.

I took a stool at the bar and ordered a meal and a bottle of wine. The silent host of waiters watched from the shadows. It was the most perfectly cooked meal I ate in South America and the wine was ambrosial. A minute or two later there was a footfall beyond the pool and I was joined at the bar by a man of middle age, a Bolivian, who also ordered a meal and then opened a conversation in French. When I expressed an interest in the club he said he knew a little about it and offered to show me round. He did so, elegantly, wittily. At one point in the tour I remarked that it was a pity there were so few patrons. He shrugged.

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‘Somebody must be losing a great deal of money,’ I ventured.

He smiled. ‘Oh, I do, I do,’ he said. ‘But I do like a place where I can get a good meal, don’t you?’

Who does not?

In the morning I set off for La Paz.

THE traveller to La Paz is warned that he will suffer grievously from *siroche* (or altitude sickness), that his ears will buzz and his eyes start from his head, that he will almost certainly fall prostrate if he so much as touches alcohol in the first three days, moreover that he will lose his memory, bleed profusely from the nose, develop haemorrhoids, and sink into a slough of impenetrable gloom from which he will emerge only on his descent to lower levels, should he survive.

Others may have found it so, though I doubt it. All I felt, all I suspect anybody has ever felt, was a slight sensation of breathlessness on the *altiplano* which stands above the city at 14,000 feet, and thereafter occasional shortages of breath while walking up the city's steep, narrow streets; since, however, one might well experience a similar breathlessness in the course of a walk up Primrose Hill, N.W.8, the old wives of La Paz would appear to be telling the same sort of tale that the explorers tell about Mato Grosso. That the altitude does affect the plainsman in some ways there is no doubt; mental and physical processes are slightly retarded; one doesn't notice it because everybody else's are, too; even a motor vehicle loses 40 per cent of its power in La Paz. Only the Indians, blessed with an incredible lung expansion, are indifferent.

I took a car down from the *altiplano* to the city 2000 feet below.

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The city lies on the slopes of a great half bowl cut in the flank of the plateau whose all but sheer walls surround it on three sides; in the distance of the fourth, Illimani stands, fifth or sixth among the mountains of the earth, always snow-capped, usually hooded in cloud; pine forests sprawled across her naked yellow shoulders like a ragged fur cloak. The city itself, viewed from the road down from the *altiplano*, looks curiously broken and fragile, like the ruins of Cassino, the colour of parchment, of adobe bleached and desiccated by sun and rain. High above the rest on the hillside are the dwellings of the pure-blooded Indians, which are of adobe, thatched; next as you descend is the larger district of the *cholos*, of mud or stone and corrugated iron; lastly you reach the centre of the city, which is modern, not uncomely, running down into the valley to Obrajes, the pleasant residential district of the city's white population.

I found a room in a hotel for which I conceived an immediate dislike — it was expensive, pompous and not very good — and with a few enquiries at the embassy and elsewhere picked up the trail of Fabulosa.

Ronald Clarke looked exactly as he had looked that afternoon in the Bolivian Consulate in Grosvenor Gardens: large, pink and eminently sane; he assured me he also felt the same. Ronald had the ability to make the world about him appear as sane as himself simply by his unsurprised acceptance of its lunatic futility. He smiled blandly, the light flashed on his glasses; he sowed his conversation with schoolboy *patois* and reduced La Paz to normalcy and revolutions to insignificance. He

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was like a young public school master who seems to take his work very casually and yet gets his entire class through school certificate. Ronald, in fact, as I came to realise, was of the company of Arthur Thomas and Don Ricardo. I asked him how it was that Fabulosa Consolidated, of which he was managing director, was the only sizable group of tin mines in Bolivia that had not been nationalised by the government.

‘Mystery to me. Bit of a wangle, I expect.’

‘What are the chances of another revolution?’

‘Pretty good, I should say. You never know with these chaps, though.’

Palm Sunday, falling at the end of the following week, seemed a likely time for the shooting to begin, since the Indians of the *altiplano*, numbering many thousands, usually drifted into the city for the celebrations and a procession. Failing Palm Sunday, there was the occasion of the forthcoming presidential address, which was to be made in public. The President was to survey a year of progress.

We left the office early. ‘Let’s go and have a look at things. We’ll pick up your traps and take them home while we’re at it.’ He had asked me to stay in his house down the valley in Obrajes, for which I was very grateful.

In the Plaza Murillo, up the steep hill, he showed me the bullet holes in the walls of the Government Palace, and the street lamp from which President Villaroel’s mutilated body was suspended during a previous revolution. In the Plaza San Francisco, where there is a very beautiful church and the clock tower presented to the city by the British colony, carpenters were erecting the

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platform from which the President was to make his speech. A little farther down the street a female German motor-cyclist was preparing to ride a motor-cycle the length of the Prado, the principal highway, but on a wire a hundred feet in the air. Which of the two stood the better chance of survival, the President or the female German motor-cyclist, was a matter for debate, but on the rare occasions when the members of the Anglo-American Club, of which I became temporarily one, got tired of dicing for drinks, there was some heavy betting on the female German motor-cyclist. In the embassies the lower echelons got out the embassy mattresses, unused since the last revolution, and had them shaken. In the markets the plump *cholas* squatted against the walls, tilted their bowler hats against the sun, spread their gaudy skirts, spat coca juice and watched the passers-by with absent black eyes.

We drove down the Prado toward Obrajes, passing the monument to Eduardo Abaroa on the way. Abaroa fought in the war of the Pacific against Chile, during which he was surrounded and called upon to surrender. 'Rendirme?' he remarked. '*Que se rinda su abuela!*' In English this would mean: 'Surrender? Surrender my grandmother!' Bolivians explain that the man was drunk at the time. His picture, and his homely challenge, are now the subject of the national postage stamp.

Bolivia has been exploited by the white man since the Spanish discovered the silver mountain at Potosi in 1545. Bolivar ejected the Spanish in the 1820's, but foreign industrial interests continued to bolster Bolivian



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economy by controlling the mines till very recently, when the Indians pushed a leftist government into power on a promise of nationalisation which was promptly carried out, with the result that at the mines taken over by the state a condition of unproductive anarchy exists.

Confusion and corruption are rife in every walk of public and industrial administration. A Bolivian politico can reckon on perhaps two years of office, at the end of which he is either strung from a street lamp or exiled, so it behoves him to make hay while he can and turn his power to his own account. Every Bolivian of initiative and intelligence sooner or later becomes entangled in the political web, but as successive governments traditionally open their brief period of office by executing or exiling their predecessors whether honest or dishonest, the good go the same way as the bad, till every brain in the land is either six feet under ground or living elsewhere on the fruits of office. Of the rest, a total population of little more than three millions, 85 per cent are either pure-bred Aymara Indian, or *cholo* — uneducated, semi-barbarian people of child-like intelligence, much addicted to the coca drug. Every Indian carries over his shoulder a small woollen purse filled with dried coca leaves, from which comes cocaine; chewed by itself the leaf is neutral, slightly bitter, both in flavour and effect; chewed with a few grains of lime, however, a chemical reaction is set up which drugs the addict and by numbing the digestive organs and dulling the wits induces the after-effects of a hearty meal.

So Bolivia's periodic protests against misgovernment grow progressively bloodier. The upheaval I had been

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warned to expect promised to be the most sanguinary to date, for in the first rosy flush of their success at the last elections the government issued quantities of arms to its supporters with which to defend their newly won rights; an Indian with a rifle, an Indian moreover embittered by yet another betrayal, dazed with coca and probably fortified with raw alcohol, is an ugly customer whether for or against. The revolution did not materialise during my stay in La Paz, but when it does it is likely to be an ill-mannered, down-to-earth affair. During the last one the insurgents commandeered a passenger plane belonging to Lloyd Boliviano and showered the city with quantities of old 75 mm. shells left over from one of the Pacific wars; since they forgot to fuse the shells before heaving them out of the plane the damage was slight and the moral effect nil; but new-fangled devices such as aerial bombardment are not welcomed in Bolivian politics. It will run to form — a matter of bullets, ropes and shawl pins.

The army, meanwhile, patrolled the streets and nervously awaited events. I was awakened two or three times at night by volleys of fire as a trigger-happy patrol blazed away at a shadow up a side-street; since, however, the purging of the military is no less a part of every government's duties than the expulsion of the civil servants, there are very few soldiers left who have been trained to shoot, and such skirmishes — usually with a police patrol — pass off with no more than accidental bloodshed and expressions of utter indifference on both sides. Ronald had two such bullet-holes in the back of his car, with which he was mildly pleased. 'A couple of chaps took

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a pot-shot at me one night,' he said. 'They got old so-and-so, too. He was driving his wife home and they opened up on him. He got her home all right and then died over the wheel. She was rather cut up about it.'

When Ronald asked me what I would like to see in the neighbourhood of La Paz I said, 'Fabulosa.'

He would be driving out to the mine, he said, during the following week; was there no other place I would like to visit?

'Many,' I said. 'Tiahuanacu, for one.'

He was delighted. 'I say, that's an idea. We'll all go. We'll have a picnic. . . .'

We set off, Ronald, Betty, Tom, a red-haired Irish accountant and I, early one morning in the Land-Rover. I had done a fair amount of reading from time to time about Tiahuanacu and the Incas who followed that civilisation and was looking forward to the trip.

We took the road out of the city and began the long climb to the *altiplano*. There is a check point at the summit, set up during some previous revolution for the examination of vehicles entering and leaving the city, which has been there so long now that a seedy little village has grown up round it; *cholas* squatted on the earth selling fruit; a dozen or more policemen lounged against the walls, cloaked against the cold wind. We survived the check and bounced along the scabrous road towards the plain, so flat, so limitless that towards its rim you seemed to see the curve of the earth itself, under the soaring white peaks of the Cordillera.

A thin grass sprouted here and there among the stones ;

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sometimes we saw an Indian settlement in the distance, low and black and thatched, set about with an adobe wall to break the force of the bitter winds, and sometimes an Indian wrapped in his poncho, following his herd, the man as shaggy and spindle-shanked as his llamas, which paused to stare with hooded eyes and then trot onwards. With no means of transport but these fragile, temperamental creatures, having no knowledge of the horse or the wheel, the Incas built and organised an empire that stretched from what is now Ecuador in the north to Santiago de Chile in the south and the Paraguay river in the east, an area which, in more familiar terms, would be equivalent roughly to Holland, Belgium, France, Switzerland and Italy.

We forded a stream, passed over a dusty ridge and came down into a village called Laja. A few Aymara women sat about the green outside the church, a Spanish building unusual for its calm simplicity of design, while inside another group were about their devotions. The system of barter still exists in remote places such as Laja; there was no money in Incaic economy; gold was prized for its beauty, colour and ease of manipulation as a metal, but never as tender; a woman of the remote uplands with something to sell still squats in silence among her goods and awaits a customer; the customer approaches, also sits down and begins to make a little heap of her own wares, indicating what it is she wishes to acquire, and continues to add to the heap till the vendor nods, satisfied; the goods then change hands.

In the church they sat on the floor in a circle below the Madonna and methodically arranged two circles of

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dried herbs on the flagstones, to the inmost of which they then set light; while the leaves smouldered, the women chanted softly in their own strange language and swayed to and fro. I saw the same rite repeated in varying forms all over Bolivia, for with the ejection of the Spaniards the influence of the church of Rome waned and the Indians, who had in any case no cause to love it, reverted in a measure to paganism; there are still too few priests and the Aymara, left to themselves, follow their own instincts in the matter.

We drove across the tenantless plains for three hours.

Rather less is known about the ruins of the city of Tiahuanacu, and particularly the stone arch called the Gate of the Sun, than the caretaker appointed by the Bolivian authorities would have one believe. The gate stands alone on the stony slopes not far from the road; around it over a wide area are the remains of a city, the long mound of earth called Acapana, and the monolithic statue known as The Bishop. It is a lonely place. As we walked across the open ground towards the ruins the caretaker, no doubt having espied us from the window of the hovel he lived in near the road, came scuttling after us, doing up his withered belt.

*'Señores! Señores!'*

We turned. However, he wished not to sell us tickets but simply to draw attention to himself.

*'Good morning, señores. I am the guide.'*

He saluted. He was swarthy and unshaven; he wore a grotesque uniform which clearly he slept in, a pair of

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wizened riding boots and a Sam Browne which, under the weight of an enormous rusty revolver, sagged like a sash about his left hip. And there was no shaking him off. He talked in a mixture of Spanish and Quechua; most of his discourse was nonsense, a good deal of it obviously invented by himself to make the visitor's journey worth while and incidentally encourage heavy tipping. Having delivered himself of a fantastic elucidation of some aspect of the ruins he would then pause and add: 'At least, that's my explanation.'

With this rider he punctuated his fabulous chatter, at first brightly and confidently; when he caught an expression of incredulity on one's face it came with a touch of defiance; as we grew bored with him, it became rather off-hand. Presently it must have occurred to him that we were content to browse for ourselves, or perhaps he had shot his bolt; at all events he lapsed into silence and followed us about picking his teeth and making expansive gestures from time to time. Ronald and Betty wandered away towards the hill of Acapana, Tom pottered about the picnic basket, I remained by the gate, the beauty of whose chiselling I found fascinating.

There was an old gentleman walking across the field towards the gate, who nodded when he arrived, and introduced himself. He was tall and stiff in his manner. His name was Rauch, he said, and he was a German archaeologist. He began to talk about the gate. The caretaker, I noticed, watched him narrowly all the time.

I asked Herr Rauch how long he had been here. He told me he lived in the new village of Tiahuanacu which lay across the stony fields.

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'Fifteen years,' he said. 'Fifteen years, awaiting permission to excavate.' The muscles in his jaws were rigid; plainly I had touched a sore spot. His voice rose. 'There is a civilisation a few feet under this earth,' he said. He struck it sharply with his stick two or three times.

'Can't you get permission to dig?'

'I have tried. I have been trying for fifteen years. They forbid it. They say they will do it for themselves, but they never do.'

'Who?' I asked.

'The Bolivian authorities.' His voice soared and cracked suddenly. 'They've put this fool here to stop me.' He indicated the caretaker, who, aware that he was being talked about but not understanding a word, scowled furiously. 'This fool——'

'He knows nothing, *señor*,' the caretaker said. 'Less than nothing.'

The old man said quietly: 'This is the cradle of South American history, of that I am convinced. The secret of pre-Inca culture lies here, perhaps the origin of the Incas themselves, perhaps the birth-place of the Polynesian peoples. Have you read Father Montesinos, sir? Father Montesinos says that when this gate was built they could write. You understand what that means, sir? *Write!* Some form of hieroglyphics. They could commit facts to stone or leaves or the barks of trees five hundred years before the Incas, who left nothing but some bits of knotted string. And it all lies here a few feet under this earth. And oafs like this one, idiots like this creature here . . .' He was almost in tears. 'They will not let me turn a single shovelful of earth . . .'

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He turned abruptly and went away across the field beating the stones with his stick.

'Loco,' the caretaker said, '*muy loco*.' He wagged his head sagaciously. 'At least, that's my explanation.'

There was a civilised community in the Collao country at the southern end of Lake Titicaca from roughly A.D. 300 to A.D. 900. They were an Indian people. At the height of their power, probably about A.D. 600, Tiahuanacu was built. The design, execution and finish of the ornamentation of the Gate, whose significance is still not fully understood, shows them to have been a people of a certain culture. The Bishop, who stands fifty yards from the gateway, was probably a minor deity subservient to the god of the Gate, variously called Viracocha, Ynti, Kon-tiki.

As the community grew in power they came into contact with the civilisation of the coastal regions of Peru, called Chuma, with whose culture there appears to have been some blending. About A.D. 800 a series of wars, earthquakes and plagues accelerated the process of decay. According to Father Montesinos (one of the Spanish historians who visited Tiahuanacu) the sages of the day ascribed the disasters to Viracocha's displeasure on the score of the practice of writing, in whatever form it took, and so writing was forbidden and the craft declined with the civilisation, but Montesinos's theories were based on nothing more solid than Incaic legend; Herr Rauch's obsession was wishful rather than circumstantial. At all events, the kings of Tiahuanacu vanished and there ensued a period of petty tribal warfare, savagery



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and chaos lasting about three hundred years. Out of the darkness the first of the Incas, Manco Ccopac, rose to power about the year A.D. 1100.

Manco Ccopac's origins are a matter of legend and fable. Incaic myth held that he and his brothers and sisters were created by Viracocha. Others had it that his mother was visited by Ynti, the sun, and afterwards conceived, presenting her son to the people clad in gold. The tale of the Shining Raiment appears in several versions. What is more likely, however, is that Sinchi Roca, the second Inca, who is the first truly historical figure, invented the tale for the sake of his own prestige.

At that time the Andean peoples were composed of an infinity of minor tribes known as *ayllus*, some of them hardly bigger than single families living in walled compounds. It was the custom of each *ayllu* to choose a war chief for defence purposes who was known as the *sinchi*, literally, 'strong man.' The *sinchis*, elected to office only for the duration of hostilities, after which they reverted to the tedious business of tilling the rocky earth, saw that a prolongation of warfare meant that their tenure of power was correspondingly extended. Wars of defence therefore became wars of conquest. Sinchi Roca was no exception. He moved north, attacked the community of Cuzco beyond the northern banks of Lake Titicaca, claimed that he was the son or grandson of the Sun, and made himself king with his *ayllu* of Incas. As their domain was extended it came to embrace the province of Collao, in which Tiahuanacu lies, but now Tiahuanacu was no more than a village in the empire of which Cuzco was the capital.

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One thing is worth saying: the Incas were not a race, they were a small tribe, an *ayllu*, perhaps no bigger than a family of brothers and sisters, which later became a royal house, a dynasty and eventually a caste. They conquered by diplomacy wherever possible, ruling innumerable tribes and peoples whom they welded into one astounding empire with one god, one language and one Inca, called the Sapa Inca. The empire was invaded by the Pizarro brothers and Almagro in 1530.

This was the gist of it. The detail of the story, for which this account is not the place, comes partly from recent archaeological exploration but mainly from the works of a number of Spanish writers — priests, officials, soldiers — who lived and travelled in the Andes during and after the Conquest; they obtained their information from the professional Inca historians, who in turn had learned it by heart from their predecessors.

The Spaniards, too, contribute to the unreliability of the tale in their own inimitable fashion. Pedro Sarmiento, for example, who was appointed by the viceroy, Toledo, to question the leading Inca authorities about their antecedents, was in a position to compile a fairly authoritative account, but Sarmiento had other axes to grind; he had to support Philip II's fatuous claim that he was the rightful sovereign of Peru by showing that the Incas from the kings of Tiahuanacu onwards were without exception bastards and usurpers; in a vain effort to justify the horrors of Toledo's rule on the spot, he, Sarmiento, was also at pains to demonstrate that the Incas were a crew of treacherous butchers, which, as it transpired, only the Spaniards proved themselves to be. The facts were still

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further garbled by the disposition of the interpreter used by Sarmiento in the course of his enquiries, one Gonzalo Jimenez, a notorious liar and self-seeker, who, being a half-breed, used his office to get a little of his own back for the contempt in which he was held by Incas and Spaniards alike. He was afterwards garrotted in secret for his perverted interest in various court page-boys.

Nevertheless, there are other Spanish authorities on Inca history and legend, among them Cieza, an old soldier, and Garcilaso de la Vega, himself a mestizo. They loved and understood the Incas and made no secret of their distaste for Spanish policy and behaviour. It is on their findings, supported by archaeological research, that present-day knowledge is founded. But there is a long way to go yet.

A shaft of pale sunlight pierced the ceiling of grey cloud and moved across the plain, itself as flat as the sky, bare and stony, tinted here and there with streaks of red: not the site one would have selected as the cradle of a civilisation, yet having a certain bleak majesty.

We ate a picnic lunch, closely watched by the caretaker and two or three Indian boys and a dog, to all of whom we presently offered plates of tinned chicken; they took their plates away among the ruins with expressions of stupefaction. Afterwards the caretaker offered with renewed enthusiasm to take us across the fields to Puma-Puncu; we gave in.

Puma-Puncu lies at a distance of about half a mile from Tiahuanacu and consists of a number of huge blocks of volcanic stone, each beautifully wrought and

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shaped, but tumbled one across the other much as if the place had collapsed in the course of an earthquake. The entrance is marked by two stone pumas in the early Tiahuanacu style.

So far the site has defied archaeology, or perhaps the Bolivian authorities have done so; but not the caretaker. Finding us a little jaded he grasped his opportunity in both hands, took up a stance on a rearing column of masonry, hooked his thumbs carelessly into his Sam Browne and delivered a lengthy discourse to the effect that this place, Puma-Puncu, had been the hall of justice, no less, and that beneath our recumbent bodies were the very dungeons into which miscreants were flung by the thousand, to die horribly among the wild beasts, snakes, toads and other repulsive fauna kept there for that specific purpose.

He might have had a point there. The puma was to the Incas the king of beasts and the puma symbol appears throughout the religious arts of Tiahuanacu and Cuzco. The same animal, now extinct except in very remote valleys of the Cordillera, may well have been the symbol of justice and punishment; in Incaic religion the realm of Supay, the devil, the inferno to which the wicked were consigned after death, was thickly populated by reptiles, rats, toads and the like; it is quite possible that the punishment meted out to transgressors, notably to liars, thieves and adulterers, was designed on earth to simulate hell in the hereafter.

We walked back through the new village of Tiahuanacu, built by the Spanish. There was very little to see but the church, a clumsy building constructed of

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stone filched from the ruins of the ancient city — a conqueror's custom not confined to the Spanish. Heaven knows how much knowledge lies buried beneath crumbling plaster and concrete. The Arabs, it seems to me, have arrived at a decent compromise in this matter of conquest and destruction. There is a village on the coast of Algeria, some sixty miles west of Algiers, called Tipasa, which fifteen hundred years ago was a prosperous Roman seaport. Albert Camus, the French Algerian writer, devoted an essay to Tipasa in a little collection entitled *Noces*. '*A certaines heures,*' he wrote, '*la campagne est noire de soleil . . .*' A good and striking phrase . . . a place black with sun. Here the Arabs have moved into the ruins like hermit crabs; they pulled down nothing and destroyed nothing; they merely rebuilt as much as it was necessary to rebuild — out of a natural laziness. Now it is Roman again. The temples in the woods are almost as they were left; they seem to murmur. But at Tiahuanacu there is only the voice of the caretaker.

IN La Paz I waited for the day we would travel to Fabulosa, which had begun to sound more and more like a cinematic adjective that the publicity departments had somehow overlooked, and for the revolution. The female motor-cyclist of German extraction who was to ride down the Prado on a wire a hundred feet in the air continued to make her preparations and no doubt the President was rehearsing his survey of a year of progress. We played golf, a game which at that altitude might be described as quite exhilarating, since a ball struck at all will travel unbelievable distances through the air, roll still further on the rocky earth, and altogether imbue the player with a glow of immeasurable well-being. There were rumours of bodies of well-armed Indians converging on the city, and rumours to the effect that this was wholly untrue. I met an elderly man in the Anglo-American club who had known and served under Colonel Fawcett on a frontier commission in 1912, and visited Mr. Buck's silver shop to examine his collection of Incaic silver ornaments.

Nothing happened. I did some work, became familiar with the interior of the church of San Francisco, and learned to exchange the time of day with some of the grinning *cholas* in the market, whose language, Quechua, clearly lends itself to bawdiness. The days slipped away. An ageing tramp threw up his arms one morning in the

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Prado and cried: 'Hallelujah! Another *gringo*. Sir, I am a beggar. A bum, sir. Nay, sir, do not smile. Am I to blame? No, sir. Is a man held to blame for his religious convictions? For it is religion, sir, no less, that has brought me to the state you see me in. Religion. Should a man work on Sunday?'

'It isn't Sunday.'

'No, sir. But on Sundays you do no work. Nor I, sir, nor I. But I am in the grip of a religious conviction that permits me to do no work for three days before Sunday, nor for three days after. I, sir, am a very religious bum. . . .'

On another day we drove across the *altiplano* to Lake Titicaca. It is more nearly an inland sea than a lake, for in the middle there is no land to be seen in any direction. At 12,000 feet the air is very clear and so the natural colours of the lake and the mountains are not dimmed by mist or heat; they are violent rather than pretty. On the fertile slopes that form the basin in which the lake lies small tribes of pure-bred Indians live, descendants of the Colla people of Tiahuanacu. They wear their own bizarre costumes which they weave themselves on primitive hand-loom, till the earth with wooden hand-ploughs of their own fashioning, and build their own dwellings of adobe and thatch. The Incas broke up the ferocious isolation of the Collas, as they did with all difficult people, by interspersing them with *ayllus* of Aymara or Quechua stock, but the Colla tribes continued to go their own way, and still do. They are very dark, with round Mongolian faces and blue-black hair and remote, hostile eyes. Mainly they are fishermen. Their canoes are

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called balsa craft, but in fact they are built of dried rushes closely woven, and are of curious and graceful design. I tried paddling a balsa; it was heavy work, for they soon become water-logged; they last about eight months and then sink without warning, and heaven help the victim if he is out on the lake alone. Titicaca has never been plumbed, but it is enough to know that the water in winter is cold enough to freeze a man to death more quickly than he will drown. A week or two before our trip a party of youngsters had hired a motor-boat on the Peruvian bank, crossed to Tiquina and, on the way back at night, probably a little drunk, had lost one of their party over the side. The boy's parents had begged the fishermen at least to search for the body, but the fishermen said that it would not come to the surface for fourteen days. On the fourteenth day exactly they found it and brought it to the shore, perfectly preserved, rigid, in the attitude in which life had left it.

The fish of Titicaca is a species of salmon which grows to an enormous size and is excellent eating. The Incas considered the fish a great delicacy, and when the Inca Yupanqui, he who sailed on a balsa raft to the Galapagos Islands and back, was touring the northern provinces of the empire, he availed himself of the system of *chasquicuna*, the state relay-runners who covered the empire from end to end, to keep himself and the Coya, his queen, adequately supplied with fresh fish from the lake. In the shape of a charm or talisman the hinged silver fish of Titicaca is still commonly used by Quechua women as a shawl pin.

We lunched on the shores of the lake at a place called



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the Yacht Club, which consisted of an adobe hut, a chicken run, some dispirited eucalyptus trees and a ramshackle landing-stage to which three home-made dinghies were moored. The secretary, captain and, so far as I could ascertain, sole member of the Club was a genial German who tried to sell Ronald one of the dinghies. However, the lunch was of Titicaca salmon and notably good. In the afternoon he introduced us to a local boatman, an Indian, who offered to take us out on the lake as far as the fishing fleet.

We edged our way along the channel cut in the reeds and headed for the open water. Two Colla boys watched us with mild curiosity; there are not many visitors to their sea. It was calm and unbelievably blue, and the sky was a dense blue-black; the towering white peaks were as clear in the water as they were along the hem of the sky. Between the pine forests on the shore, as we drew away, there were patches of yellow maize. We made towards the distant fleet of balsas which by an optical illusion appeared to be afloat several yards above the water's surface. The fishermen took no notice whatever of our coming and going. We sailed the lake for a long time for no reason except that it went some way towards satisfying one's hunger to be a part of it.

I had noticed large numbers of Indians on the tracks across the *altiplano*, all heading for La Paz; on the way back we passed still more, most of them plodding along on foot with little herds of llamas, some mounted in the back of dilapidated trucks, swaying and bouncing shoulder to shoulder as the truck lurched hither and

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thither. Tomorrow was Palm Sunday. We came down into the city through the camping area; I left the jeep to walk over the wide slopes. 'Don't get into any arguments,' Ronald called.

The shadows of the pines at the roadside stretched far down the hill in the golden evening sunshine and the murmur of the concourse drifted up on the still air. I passed an Aymara woman in a flaming scarlet skirt and brown bowler hat driving a few dusty sheep down the track, and the child in the shawl on her back eyed me solemnly. They squatted in thousands on the bare slopes, sometimes in pairs or threes, mostly alone, staring across the sea of coarse, flamboyant colour to the ashen walls of the city below, and Illimani, superb in the sun, beyond. Every woman wore her choicest selection of skirts, probably all her skirts, for in their profusion lies caste and social standing; those with something to sell sat behind their wares, lengths of gaudy fabric, sandals made of old motor tyres, woollen caps or vegetables; there was no calling of wares; I never saw, either there or in the markets, any attempt to attract attention, much less custom. The men for their part stood about gloomily and chewed coca and looked at the heaps of whittled poles which were for sale, for thatch roofing and the building of walls. I caught one or two hostile stares, but nobody barred my way.

In the sunset they danced. The music of the Incas was made with percussion and wind instruments, reed flutes as a rule, but I heard them only in the remoter valleys of the Cordillera where their frail melancholy trilling with its fathomless rhythm is strangely moving.

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An attempt has been made to adapt rhythm and melody to other instruments, notably of brass; the music they were dancing to here was of that variety; to me it sounded like a local brass band warming up on a cold afternoon, flexing stiff fingers and blue lips with a series of practice toots and twiddly-bits. But the dancers seemed satisfied, principally perhaps because Bolivian folk-dances are of colour rather than movement. They are designed to show off the lady's skirts. The male, dressed in white and wearing a devil mask, stands more or less on one spot while his partner, holding his raised hand, twirls and pirouettes about him. The effect of a dozen or more pairs all spinning about one another is extraordinary.

But Palm Sunday passed without disturbance. A number of Indians got drunk on raw alcohol, which is not difficult, and the police hauled them off to the city jail.

The offices of Fabulosa Consolidated were to be found in an old house up a side street off the steep, cobbled hill. You entered beneath an arch and then there was a courtyard littered with disused mining tools, specimens of rock and numbers of iron mill-stones about the size of cannon-balls, worn oval with use. Ronald's office was on the first floor up a flight or two of sagging steps. I asked him about the name.

'Hell of a name, isn't it?'

'What happened?'

'Don't blame me, old boy. The fellows who found the seam thought they were on to the biggest thing that ever happened, so they called it Fabulosa.'

'And weren't they?'

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'Well, it was pretty big, but not so big as all that. We could make it so, of course. Other seams have been identified quite recently. But the Bolivian bigwigs won't let us plough back our profits and start new workings. They grab the lot. So we're flummoxed, as you might say. Damn silly, taking it all round.'

He went on: 'Still, we're lucky to be working at all. The others have been nationalised. And you never know, things change pretty rapidly around here. Anti-gringo feeling is dying down. When the British and Americans were running the show, at least the miners were paid. They see it for themselves now.'

He told me how it had come about that he held this job. After the war he had returned to London and had looked round for work of a more adventurous nature than was to be had in the neighbourhood of Throgmorton Street. Through a series of unpromising introductions he had stumbled at last on an offer of work as assistant to the then managing director of a group of tin mines in Bolivia. At the interview he had been subjected to a brief scrutiny and then one thunderbolt of a question: 'What was your regiment?'

A hazardous method of selecting staff, one would think, and too redolent of the world of Kipling, but it is amazing how well and how often it still functions. A year or two later Ronald succeeded to the Vice-Chairman's chair, in which he had since sat with perfect competence, undismayed either by his responsibilities or by the remote, feverish land he had made his home.

We set out for the mine that morning.

This time we did not travel across the *altiplano*

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instead we skirted it, keeping to the foothills of the Cordillera itself, climbing all the way. The Land-Rover bucked and pitched on the track. It was a long way. We came to a place on the summit of a wind-swept ridge where there was an Indian cemetery and I got out to have a look at it. A few tiny lopsided chapels of adobe and rock not unlike dog-kennels huddled together on the crest; there were bowls and knives and scraps of clothing at the entrance to each, and each was crowned with a Cross, but it might as well have been the symbol of Viracocha. We were quite high, then, about 15,000 feet, and it was cold; a few steps left one panting and blowing, glad to get back to the jeep.

We drove on for nearly three hours. The earth grew wilder and more barren with every foot of altitude and the slopes flowed away to the foot of the peaks themselves, which here and there were stained with colour, deep red and veins of brown. The sky was like ink and snow lay in the rifts and crevices of the mountains below us.

Just before midday we reached the shoulder of a pass and Ronald said: 'This is it.'

There was a shallow, tapering valley below us; its walls were the stained slopes of the mountainsides; in the floor of the valley there was a lake, and on the right of the lake a sprawl of low buildings. 'This is Fabulosa,' Ronald said again.

Now, of course, having been there and seen the place, it could never be other than it was. But before that day it had had no existence anywhere, in any shape. The

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name is so flimsy, so transparent that it gives back no echo in the imagination; the mind's eye catches no reflection. And because it is so hard to respond to such a name except perhaps with mockery, one's mind, called on to provide an image of some kind, harks back to childhood, to a time when the spirit was wide enough and deep enough to accept it without derision and moreover make it as real as reality, more so perhaps, and people it and call to it and get back an echo.

This, I think, is why Fabulosa had taken in my mind the shape and character of a certain sand-pit: a disused gravel-working, it was, in which I used to play as a boy, no doubt a mere gravel-working like any other, an orange-coloured gash in the earth left to heal itself, a forlorn, bad-smelling place overgrown with brambles, having a patch of water in the middle whose depths gleamed of old tin cans and the débris of the years, but which, to a small boy with a bicycle and a stammer, was anything he cared to make it, for the impediment drove one into one's imagination a good deal, and the bicycle, though battered, was winged, and the sand-pit not very far from home, as I remember. I went there often.

The valley of Fabulosa was certainly a place that lent itself to the imagination, but it bore no likeness to a sandpit. It lay at an altitude of hard on 18,000 feet, a height from which you could peer over the edge, as it were, and perhaps discern some 3000 feet below the summit of the highest mountain in Europe, Mont Blanc; nothing that could happen in so high and inaccessible a place could pertain to reality; and none of it did.

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'First,' Ronald said, 'we'll go and have a look at my road.'

We drove down into the valley, passed behind the dishevelled cluster of roofs and walls and slag, crossed over at the upper end of the still, green lake and began to climb again, zigzagging over the stony slopes to the shoulder of the ridge and on to a road newly cut below the crest.

'Took a bit of building, this road,' Ronald said. I liked his pride in it. 'The chaps told us we hadn't a ghost of a chance, that's why nobody had ever done anything about those new seams. I found a young engineer who said it was possible and got him to draw up a plan, and here we are.' The road sped from hump to hump across the grey volcanic ridges. 'You have to watch out for landslips,' Ronald said, 'otherwise it's as simple as pie.'

I looked down into the misty blue depths.

'Nice smooth surface, don't you think?'

'Very, yes.' My head was spinning with the altitude and I felt sick. We stopped once and I got out to try to take a photograph; the view was splendid and had I not forgotten to remove the lens cap the photograph might have been quite good. I dragged my feet back to the jeep and leaned against it, panting. At 18,000 feet movement is an effort for any but the trained mountaineer.

'We ought not to hang about too long,' Ronald said, 'if you want to see the mill. The evening mists come down pretty quickly here.'

We drove back to the mine.

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No doubt there was system in the lay-out of the buildings, but it was not apparent to me. I saw a litter of Indian dwellings, storehouses, workshops and slag-heaps, all huddled about the mill itself, a tumble-down affair of wooden huts mounted on joists and props arranged in haphazard succession down the steep hillside; the rumble and squeal of machinery and a rhythmical thudding emanated from it, not unlike the noise a dredger makes. A few Indians slouched about the alleys and open spaces and a buxom *chola* hopped out of the way of the jeep and peered round the corner at us.

The uproar inside the mill was fantastic. I expected it to collapse under the strain of its own vibration. Where the ore was brought in from the galleries in the mountainside, at the upper end of the mill, it was fed into a revolving drum half filled with iron teeth and cannon balls which ground the rock into a shingle; this was carried to another such drum in which it was ground smaller still. There were five of these contraptions each as alarming as its neighbour, like gargantuan mouths which chewed rock, chewed it again, and then spat it out. We stood alongside the machines on tiny, trembling platforms of timber, and from stage to stage of the processing made our way downwards along a series of narrow, greasy walks and ladders from which a slip would have meant death in an unusually disagreeable form, and had done so, Ronald told me, a week or two previously, when one of the Indian hands fell into a drum. However, I grew accustomed to the din and the gloom and presently had a look at the foreman, this bland Nostromo who accompanied us. He was a



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man of middle age with a handsome, humorous face; he spoke, or shouted, good English and not all his filthy overalls and blackened felt hat could hide the fact that he had not been reared in a tin mill.

'He backed the wrong side in a revolution,' Ronald bawled. 'Come and look at the refining tables.'

For a few minutes we watched the quivering tables. Here the ore, now of the consistency of sand, was diluted with water and fed on to the table; in the vibration the tin broke free from the slag. It was very simple. Finally it was dried and shovelled into sacks in an outhouse: a brown sand looking rather like gunpowder. From Fabulosa, to round off the story, it would be carried in trucks across the mountains to the railhead at La Paz and thence over the Western Cordillera and down to the Pacific coast for shipment to North America and Europe.

'How about a cup of tea?' Ronald said.

Very well, then, tea: afternoon tea. Fabulosa tried hard to be commonplace and achieved only another degree of improbability. We walked over the slag towards the cottages. The sun had gone down and it was bitter cold now. 'We'll have to look sharp,' Randolph said. He narrowed his eyes at the pass above the valley where the wall of mist was gathering; it had begun to dribble down the slopes, over the snow. 'A quick cup,' he said.

In the cheerless little cottage there were the three English boys who ran the mine; they were very young; the way they dashed in and out and gulped tea and sugared buns and exchanged casual comments gave the place the atmosphere of a company H.Q. not too far

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from a battlefield. I asked them if they ever had trouble with the Indians, of whom there were nine hundred under their control. They were taken aback. 'Trouble? What sort of trouble?'

Tea was served by an Aymara woman with a glossy face, pigtails and a small, brown bowler hat.

That was all. We drove up to the crest of the ridge and looked back. The cloud was pouring down the slopes still. There was nothing to be seen of the valley but the white quilt of mist. You could mark the level at which it washed against the stony walls.

The President's survey was postponed, and so was the revolution. I had promised to lecture in Lima and there were not many days to spare, so I set about the tedious business of getting permission to leave Bolivia. Permission was obtained by bribery in a fairly short time, but there remained the difficulty of the camera and the typewriter, both of which would be confiscated by the customs authorities unless I could produce a certificate to the effect that I had brought them into the country in the first place. As the customs authorities at the eastern frontier had seen the two items but had failed to mention any such certificate, I was inclined to regard it all as little better than a trap, a crude device for divesting travellers of their valuables, not to be taken seriously, but Ronald was in earnest about it and said he thought the best thing to do was to ask Dick, a senior official at the embassy, to get the Ambassador to speak to the Minister of Education on the subject. I had met Dick several times, once rather impressively attired in jodhpurs;

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he was going for a ride with H.E. that day, he said. In the matter of the camera and typewriter he was as friendly and helpful as he always was, but unhappily H.E. was away, Dick himself had not yet met the Minister of Education, and as these matters were plainly better settled on an Old Boy Basis, he foresaw difficulties. Eventually an underhand arrangement was made with the individual employed by Lloyd Boliviano to sweep out the aircraft prior to its departure, who for the sake of his ailing mother promised to smuggle the accursed goods on board; he would pick them up in the gentlemen's lavatory. However, this too failed. When I reached the airport the camera and typewriter were lying brazenly on the customs bench.

There was nothing to do but argue, heatedly, bitterly, protractedly, to the keen pleasure of the rest of the passengers and one in particular, an attractive insurance broker from California, who laughed till she wept. In the upshot I was permitted to keep my belongings.

I joined the queue for Lima.

PART THREE

INCA



## I

THERE is no such thing as an open mind. The mind of a person making such an assertion plainly bristles with prefabricated opinions and prejudices ; my own, on arriving in Lima, arose in the main from the fact that this was the first civilised city I had seen in several months and therefore represented a degree of return to normal.

It is a clean, pleasant, white city, founded by Pizarro in 1538 in the exact centre of a permanent climatic depression caused by the neighbouring hills, which certainly would protect it from the wind, were there any, but which also ensure that the sky above is obscured for ten months out of twelve by an uneventful, dun-coloured cloud which never produces rain, deprives the city of sunlight, and maintains the atmosphere at a steady level of hot humidity.

Something of the splendour of the viceregal court still clings to Lima, however. The streets are spacious and the pace leisurely ; many Spanish buildings still stand, their elaborate balconies, shuttered so that their owners could see without being seen, overhanging the sidewalks. Until quite recently the city's aristocracy, those of pure Spanish descent, lived much as they had lived for several hundred years, aloof from work ; certain gracious squares were set aside for their evening stroll, and no others were permitted to enter. However, there were never many such families, for the mass of Peruvians are of mixed blood,

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Indian and Spanish. During the early years of the Conquest the court of Spain would permit no Spanish women of whatever class to travel to the colonies, even with their husbands; later, married women were allowed to go, but not their daughters. The armies and officials of the empire therefore looked elsewhere for wives and mistresses and found that many of the Inca maidens were attractive; the Inca Garcilaso de la Vega, the historian, was the child of one such marriage; there were many others. It is interesting to wonder what might have happened in the world if the British government had refused permission for the wives and daughters of colonial officials and settlers to join their husbands or fathers in, for example, India.

Ila, as I have said, was an insurance broker. She was doing a brisk tour of South America in order to get away from it all. She was a thoroughly nice, capable and good-looking woman, and she could talk the hind leg off a mule. To tell the truth, I did not take her reasons for her journey very seriously, for the moment she discovered I had neglected to insure myself before undertaking my own journey it became clear that she had brought it all with her. She was appalled. 'You've been travelling about all those dangerous places in Brazil and you're not even *insured*?'

She at once set about selling me not merely a policy but the high principles of insurance as well. Now I have always regarded insurance not so much as a means of making somebody else pay for one's own disasters after they have occurred, but rather as a hopeless effort to stave them off altogether — a futile attempt, in fact, to pro-

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pitiate the Almighty in advance. I listened. She talked convincingly enough, but I had a notion she was talking no less to herself, flaying a reluctant spirit with the worthwhileness of its mission. I suggested as much. 'Weren't you supposed to have left it all behind you?'

She stopped suddenly and shook her head.

'I believe you hate the whole affair.'

'Hell,' she said piteously, 'a girl's got to get something out of life.'

I felt myself unspeakably callous, so we drank a bottle of wine, and thereafter many in the days that followed. They were good days, too, of their kind. We gaped at the sights, we went to the bull fights, for which Ila showed an unexpected enthusiasm, we went to open-air concerts; we ate beautifully cooked meals, sampling the entire menu but returning always to avocado pears stuffed with Pacific prawns and a mayonnaise the like of which I have not tasted elsewhere. We traipsed round a decent proportion of Lima's sixty-four churches, recoiled from the remnants of Pizarro in a glass coffin, and danced till four o'clock in the morning. We held up the principles of insurance to derision. Between bouts of tourism with Ila, I gave my lectures.

The British Council's activities in Peru, those of its subsidiary Institute, and indeed all the Council's branches overseas that I have come across, are clearly so successful and so advantageous that one wonders exactly what it is about this organisation that prompts the savagely sarcastic attacks it is subjected to from time to time. Certainly it is open to criticism: too many semi-intellectual misfits have been shunted into the administrative offices, which



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form for them a pleasantly secluded siding well removed from the hurly-burly of the main line: too many lecturers have been sent abroad in the past to strike a ringing blow for folk-dancing and glee singing. The head offices occupy some of the most expensive sites in the West End of London. Hammersmith would do equally well. But this does not diminish the efficacy of the overseas branches, which are run by able and industrious family men who know what they are about and do it well for meagre salaries because they like the work and believe in it.

It is in the Institutes that the organisation is seen at its best. An Institute — a bad word, smelling of mice — is at once a club and a college where students of any age have access to a good library, good company, and lessons in all manner of English subjects. The students pay for their tuition, the Institutes are thus self-supporting, and indeed have been known to show a profit. In Peru one is faced with the fabulous fact that two-thirds of the total cost of British cultural propaganda in that country is paid by Peruvians.

There seems no reason why the idea should not be extended. A few technical schools, run on the same lines as the cultural Institutes, would do no harm in South America. Technicians, when trained, are more likely to buy the machines they know than those they don't, and are willing to pay for their training. An opportunity of making powerful friends and inexhaustible markets at small cost is being blatantly missed.

In the vaults beneath the Bolivar Hotel there is a night club. At the other end of the bar, the evening I

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was there, were two North Americans, one thin and tight-lipped and sandy, the other dark and burly; they were with a Peruvian girl.

Presently the second of the two, the heavily built man who must have been about thirty, drifted towards my stool and we began a conversation. It was plain that he had drunk a certain amount of wine; his attitude, if not downright belligerent, was at least touchy. He moved his head in the direction of his companion, who was now dancing with the Peruvian girl.

'If he thinks he can make an air stewardess,' he said sombrely, 'he'd better think again. Nobody's ever made an air stewardess. Waste of time. Have a drink. What are you doing in Lima?'

I told him I was travelling through.

'Nobody ever made an air stewardess.' He watched the couple on the floor.

I asked him: 'Are you an engineer?'

'I was running a tin mine up in Bolivia, till they nationalised it.' Something told me this was not the truth, but it was none of my business. 'Wha'd'y say you were?'

'A writer.'

The dancers returned and as they passed I glanced at them and my companion drifted away to rejoin them at the bar. After a while he came back to where I was now sitting at a table. Another man had seated himself at the table, of whom I can remember nothing except that he was there.

'The boss says to quit looking at his girl.'

'Is he the boss?' That was the narrow, sandy man.

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'Watch your step.'

'He seems very young, doesn't he?'

'They sent him down to take over.' Apparently I had touched on a sensitive spot. 'They say he's bright. Bright.' He looked at the couple at the bar. 'He says lay off that air stewardess.'

Then as I remember it he was talking to the other man at the table and showing him the card in his wallet. The card bore his own photograph and a number of signatures, and he was holding it in such a way that I should see it and know what it was. He had taken a badge from his pocket and it was under his hand on the table.

I said: 'I thought you were a mining engineer,' which was a blunder.

He eyed me heavily. 'You're harrying me,' he said.

'Sorry.'

'Quit harrying me, will you?'

'Can you be a deputy sheriff and a mining engineer all at once?' I asked. 'It's none of my business, but you've made it so.'

He leaned toward me, his face stiffening. 'Wha's your weight?'

'Sorry — what's my what?'

'Weight,' he said. 'Your weight. How much d'you weigh?'

'Oh, thirteen stone odd.'

'What sort of stones?'

'A fair size — weigh about fourteen pounds each.' This was growing absurd, puerile, and very enjoyable.

'Fourteen pounds. Gimme a pencil, somebody . . .'

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He fumbled in his own pocket, found a pencil, and on a scrap of paper began a devious calculation. 'Hunnerd and eighty,' he said presently. 'That right?'

'That will be about right.'

'Right. I'm two hunnerd. Twenty pounds make any difference to you?'

'None at all.'

'Come on, then.' He made to get up.

'Where to?' I asked him

'Outside.'

'What on earth for?'

'You been harrying me.'

'Oh, good heavens, listen, let's not get carried away by this thing. I don't want to fight you. I don't even want to quarrel with you. Besides, I haven't had as much to drink as you have. Let's have another and forget it.'

'Nobody's going to harry me. Come on.'

'Good God, must we?'

'I got to slam you.'

'You're not obliged to, old chap. Nobody's going to think the less of you if you don't.'

He said solemnly: 'You know wha's the matter with you? Your liver's white.'

'That seems to settle it,' I said. 'That's a very unpleasant thing to say. Come along, then.' I had no particular liking for brawls in back alleys, much less in the foyers of night clubs, but it looked as if he would not be satisfied till he had swung his massive fists. 'You've torn it now, properly.'

I stood up, a little angered, not by the petty insult but by being left no choice except to go on with it.

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He sat down. 'Sit down,' he said, 'si' down, si' down. You're all right. Was just testing you out. It's a thing you've got to get to know.'

I sat down again and said: 'Listen, old fellow, if you go around picking quarrels with sober strangers you're liable to get your nose bloodied. And you owe me an apology.'

'Okay, okay, 'pologise. I like you.'

We shook hands with the utmost gravity.

'Lissen, what are you doing here?'

I told him again. 'I'm a writer.'

'Sure, sure. I imagine.'

Suddenly it dawned on me. So here it was again. Those wily British Intelligence people were ferreting about in Lima now. It was astounding. One would have thought my trade an unusually inoffensive one; not so, evidently; or perhaps its very innocence causes it to be suspect. At all events, it is clear that my calling has a sinister quality all its own; I am still at a loss to name it.

'Who're you working for?'

'Nobody. Myself.'

'I can use you,' he said.

I grinned at him. 'You don't say.'

'You're hired.'

'Sorry, I don't hire so easily.'

'Name your figure.'

'You've got the wrong idea,' I told him again. 'I'm not on sale.'

'I'll pay you what you want.'

'There isn't any price. Stop harrying me.'

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His face darkened. 'Wha's your weight?' he said.

'We've been through all that.'

'Well, then, name your figure.'

It occurred to me then that I had several days to spare. Why not? It might be very entertaining. Certainly there was nothing to lose.

'What kind of work is it?' I asked him.

He smiled knowingly. 'What sort of a fool d'you think I am, hey?'

'I would hardly accept work without knowing what kind of work it is,' I said.

He nodded, very satisfied. 'Was just testing you out,' he said. 'It's a thing you got to get to know. You're all right. Come to my office in the morning.'

'Where is it?'

He gave me the name of a building in the city. 'Tomorrow morning, eleven o'clock.'

'I'll be there.'

We shook hands again. In a minute he looked over his shoulder. 'Look at that. He thinks he's going to make that air stewardess,' he said wistfully.

On the following morning I combed the telephone directories, and then the city itself, but I never found that building.

I found instead a museum, an excellent place full of interest. It was chiefly of Tiahuanacu and Incaic antiquities and was privately owned at one time, I believe; an elderly relative of the same family still controls it, so I was informed, and from time to time this lady denies entry to certain parts of the museum, nobody knows

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why. She had chosen this occasion to do so. Moreover, from the moment of my entry till I left I was hounded by a girl of hostile disposition who never quitted my elbow; I ran the tips of my fingers over a monolithic statue of granite weighing some twenty tons. No, no, said she, pouncing, that was prohibited: presumably lest I should deface it or, while her back was turned, tuck it under my arm and make off with it. But not even this dreary girl's attentions could detract from the interest of the Incaic robes and tapestries, nor from the sublime skill of their design, nor from the lovely composition of the motifs with which the gourds were graced; Picasso has nothing to show like these. The mummies, if you could look them in the teeth, were no less interesting, for it was the custom of the Incas to mummify their dead before burial, first disembowelling them; the body was then placed in a basket, the head resting on the bent knees, and the whole wrapped about with a white fabric till it resembled a large bundle of laundry. If the dead man or woman was of high caste, then his body was mummified, dressed in his finest robes, and kept in the house in which he had lived, to be taken out on state occasions and carried in processions through the streets. The dead Inca himself sat beneath the image of Viracocha in the Temple of the Sun.

One afternoon we went to the Acho bull-ring, hired a couple of cushions designed for sitting on but used exclusively for throwing at matadors, and found our seats on the shady side. It was all rather shabby and second-rate; out of season the ring is used by learners or by the elders to whom the Spanish and Mexican

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circuits are denied. We saw six bulls, one of which created a very unfavourable impression by refusing to attack anybody for any reason whatever, and God knows there was provocation. A number of oxen were herded into the arena, whence they eyed the crowd amiably and looked about for pasture; when they were driven out again the bull followed them with an alacrity that confirmed previous impressions, and was roundly booed. Four of the remaining five were done to death by agonising stages and with frightful difficulty. Ineptitude reached heights which left the crowd stupefied and silent, for in every case it became clear that the matadors were wholly incapable of killing the courageous beasts which, one by one, with bloodied humps and heaving bellies, stood rocking on their legs, bleating for the *coup de grâce*.

At last, towards the end of a sanguinary afternoon, a young *novidado* pulled himself together and showed how it should be done, and of a sudden one felt once again the impact of the game — this stiff little saraband in the sun at each pass of which the dancers, man and bull, melted, flowed, mingled and then, vibrating, resumed coherence. The animal was mastered, with a final twirl of the cape transfixed, and then cleanly killed. The crowd rose to its feet. The young matador was presented with the beast's ears, which presumably he tossed laughingly into his loved one's lap soon after as if they were nothing but a pair of bull's ears. His triumphal tour of the ring on the shoulders of his supporters, however, was brought to an unhappy end by a cushion which, no doubt flung as a tribute by a delirious admirer, struck



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him on the side of the head and calamitously unseated him.

The next day I hired what I thought was the oldest taxi in Lima, hoping that it would also prove the cheapest, and drove up into the hills behind the city to have a look at the view, which was very fine. Standing among the trees on the hillside below the road there was a small Indian village; a boy came clambering up the bank to the road, and stood staring at the car. He was very ragged and was wearing what must have been his father's jacket, which reached almost to the ground. I was about to speak to him when I was struck by the memory of another boy I had forgotten — a small boy on a hillside in Italy, in the Futa pass, whom I had seen during the war. He, too, had been fascinated by the truck we were travelling in; we had stopped half-way up the pass to let the engine cool down; there was a badly shelled village on the slopes beneath us and the child had seen us and had climbed up to the road to stare wide-eyed at the truck.

We called him, I remember, but he wouldn't approach. We held out bits of chocolate and tried to tempt him, and at last, timid as a fawn, he came nearer, long-haired and grotesque in his jacket, its sleeves so long that nothing of his hands was visible. He reached for the chocolate but the length of the sleeves hindered him, so we popped it in his mouth. Then he unbent a little, and talked shyly. He said that when he grew up he wanted to drive a truck like this one; Palmer, the driver, lifted him bodily into the driver's seat and encouraged him to take hold of the wheel, but when he raised his arms to

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do so the sleeves slipped back; his hands had been blown off or had been cut off somehow and he had nothing but a pair of small pink stumps to hold the wheel with. There was nothing to say. We filled up the pockets of the jacket with tins of food and he went clattering down the hill to the village. Some weeks later we passed that way again, but this time there was much more traffic; he was sitting at the roadside holding up his wrists so that everybody could see them; people threw things to him as they went by, tins of food or chocolate or ration biscuits or whatever they had handy.

I mention this incident not particularly because it is relevant of itself, but because the recollection led on towards something I had been trying to pin down since I had disembarked in Rio.

South America was not marked by the war. Brazil sent a contingent to Italy — the only Latin-American country to do so — but that was all. Now the difference between men and women who were directly embattled and others who were not is very hard to name. In Europe one is not aware that there is a difference at all, for we share the common experience. Elsewhere there is, and you feel it — not acutely, but it is there. You feel it because war, the apogee of human experience, is the highest peak that man may be compelled to climb, and it is unique; it therefore becomes something in the nature of a landmark which, because it towers above all others, can never be entirely lost to sight; in some sense you take your bearings from it, you are conditioned by it. But it is only when you rub shoulders with a people who are free of its shadow that you realise this. The

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difference between you and them is not to be weighed in terms of lightness of heart, nor of maturity or age, nor even in outward behaviour. What is missing is the profound sense of brotherhood, not because it can never exist between man and man without the mutual experience of war — that would be absurd — but because war is one of the scourges which, shared, seems to bring nearer to the human surface what one may call the roots — the absolute concordance which dispenses with the necessity to grope for understanding by the use of words. The understanding is already there, and needs no discussion.

Old soldiers have it, among themselves. No doubt other men who have fought also have it, but my own experience of war is limited to soldiering. Long ago one morning in the hour before the dawn I crouched in a hole in the dry earth of Tunisia, waiting for the attack we knew was coming. There was another man sharing the hole. I remember the dim shape huddled in the corner at my side, though I have no recollection who it was — probably my own company signals corporal. It is then that you feel fear, in that desolate hour, watching the grey light creep across the earth towards you. It reaches a pitch at which you know you can stand it no longer. But at the moment of supreme terror there comes a kind of release, a sudden relaxation, as if you had passed a formidable test of some kind and were free. I fancy it is what Stendhal called the freedom of a man under sentence of death. You have gone on beyond it and now you no longer fear it. It is then that you look at the man at your side, and he at you;

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then for the first time you are aware of the revelation of something profounder than you have ever known before, which you share with him. I remember the man smiled and whispered: 'I just hope it doesn't hurt, that's all.'

IT is fairly easy not to be a tourist if you stay in Bournemouth. Not to be a tourist in Peru is more difficult. Travel today except in very distant places is so highly organised that it is next to impossible to see what you would like to see except as one of a small herd with a camera slung about your neck in the manner of a Tyrolean cow-bell, and a book with which to trip up the guide every now and then to show you are paying attention, and moreover that what he is saying is, according to your book, a pack of damnable lies. For the first two days in Cuzco I trooped about the town with a party of people who were admirably unselfconscious in this respect.

The Peruvian government has built one or two hotels in places frequented by foreign visitors. There is one in Cuzco. It is not at all a bad hotel, rather bleak and chilling, and the food pretends to no more than simplicity, but the rooms are good and they are clean; then, too, the hotel caters for the predilection of the local airlines and railways for getting one out of bed in the small hours of the morning: a breakfast is served.

To get to Cuzco you leave Lima while it is still dark, drive to the airport and there suffer the usual and wholly unnecessary wait of an hour or more till the plane is ready to take off. But it is a good flight. We flew

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through the Andes in the dawn, climbing to 22,000 feet among some of the highest and noblest peaks in the world, snow-covered and glittering in the morning sunshine, passing so close among them that the wing-tip seemed to cut a furrow in the snow.

Cuzco, which the Incas called the navel of the empire, lies in a shallow bowl among the mountains. It is a small impoverished town of no industrial or political importance; coca is grown in the neighbourhood and the Urubamba valley produces quantities of fruit and vegetables; but Cuzco's principal interest is historical. It is built among the ruins of a civilisation which came into being out of the strength and character of a people who, till the arrival of Francisco Pizarro and the Conquistadores, had had no contact with the rest of the world. The area is periodically devastated by earthquakes, latterly in 1946 and 1950, when most of the modern buildings collapsed, some of the Spanish, and none of the Incaic. This unhappy town is saddled with no less than twenty-four churches, for though the Spaniards used the Christian symbol as an instrument for the mutilation and destruction of Indian bodies, they were deeply concerned about Indian souls, and catered handsomely for their redemption. In parenthesis, to execrate a defunct sixteenth-century power for its failure to demonstrate a twentieth-century morality, however itself rather localised, is only to match Spanish abuse of the Incas for a similar reason, and serves no useful purpose. The story is finished; that particular example of man's inhumanity to man has sunk into the pattern of the rest. Yet you must have the soul of the true historian to be able to

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study the rape of the peoples and culture of the Andes, and the way it was done, with nothing but clinical interest.

The guide was a pure-blooded Indian of the type one may still find in some of the remoter valleys, probably of indirect Inca descent, solidly built, with black hair and a brown face, dark eyes, a wide high-bridged nose and a natural dignity of manner. His North American suit became him ill; a poncho would have suited him better. He spoke a few thick words of English and some Spanish; his own tongue was Quechua.

'We go round the town,' he announced to the party. 'Look at some churches.'

There was a brief silence. 'All twenty-four of them?' a woman quavered.

'Not all,' he answered. 'Some.'

A business man who looked exactly like Mr. Truman said gloomily: 'I estimate that in the last month my wife and I have looked at damn near two hundred churches.'

'History is found in churches,' a girl said, 'so they say.'

Mr. Truman said: 'This is just about the religiourest tour we ever did.' He sighed. 'Well, come on, folks, let's go.'

We braced ourselves and set off down the street. Bright chatter broke out in the party.

'Say, was your room cold in the night?'

'I damn near froze.'

'Me, too.'

'We got ourselves an electric fire. Did you know you could hire electric fires in that hotel?'

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'Well, I heard about them,' a woman said, 'but I didn't have one on account of short circuits. You can set a place on fire with a short circuit.'

She was rather drab, this woman, and timid and naïve. She told me later she was somebody's private secretary. She had developed a taste for travel only recently; the man she worked for, who was a fine man, had given her an extra week's vacation this year so that she could do this tour of South America and get some more culture, and it was costing every penny she had; she wrote about it to her friends every night, though. She more or less confirmed my suspicion that the short circuit was an invention to cover the fact that she could not afford the few cents extra it would have cost to hire a fire. I wondered how many other little excuses she had rigged up in the course of her journey in her anxiety to keep the respect of the people she was traveling with, who were very much richer than she was. She need not have done so: she was likeable for her own sake.

'Did you have an electric fire?' she asked me.

'Well, no. But we're used to cold bedrooms in England.'

'Do you like them?'

'No, we just make a virtue of them.'

She smiled and seemed satisfied.

She fitted the traditional mould so perfectly that one felt one had met her before, quite often. She was universal, of course, with a universal background of gas-rings and dingy back rooms, at once the butt and the object of patronising sympathy of a hundred novelists.



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She had saved her money for this trip for a long time, and I am quite sure she did not know where these places were on a map, nor what they signified. She suffered herself to be hauled from church to church and from ruin to ruin and to her they meant nothing: they were culture — churches and ruins in a place called Cuzco, where there was a good deal of dust and some very pungent smells. She listened closely to the guide because his comments seemed to lend a pulse to the tall impassive walls and thinned the fog of not-knowing through which she groped her way, smiling brightly. Everybody was covertly concerned that she should get her money's worth.

Among the heaps of rubble and broken masonry handfuls of workmen were repairing the damage caused by the 1950 earthquake, a severe one, which incidentally brought to light the tombs of Gonzalo, half-brother to Francisco, and of the two Almagros, father and son; for the rest, earthquakes have nothing to recommend them. Cuzco today resembles a place that has been ruthlessly bombed, and its citizens, already punch-drunk with centuries of starvation and oppression, move among the débris with a grey plodding patience. We shuffled round the square from church to church, five or six of them like rival cinemas in Leicester Square, huge baroque affairs embellished with domes and turrets and belfries, all open, all untenanted, their cavernous depths hung with second-class paintings and carved pulpits, towering silver altars and dust, dust that dried on one's lips, dust that gritted under one's feet and spiralled slowly and floated across the shaft of sunlight that fell

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from a broken window. We trooped along a narrow alley of Indian dwellings. And it was here that I fell out, amiably but disastrously, with my companions, who took loud exception to the variety of odours with which the alley was graced.

'These are the walls of the house of the Inca Roca,' the guide said.

A man with his handkerchief pressed to his nose said: 'Don't they have street cleaners in this town?'

'The Incas were great architects and builders,' the guide said. He indicated that magnificent wall, perfectly proportioned, exactly aligned at a slight angle, each massive block of granite chiselled and smoothed by hand till it fitted with its neighbours in such a way that it has not budged an inch in five hundred years and a score of earthquakes and will not allow the insertion of a knife-blade. Nobody listened.

At the time of Pizarro's landing in 1530 the Sapa Inca was head of the empire in every respect. He controlled it himself, militarily, socially, administratively; he was the apex of the pyramid of organisation. Below him, down to units of as few as ten people, was a system of government the like of which has not been seen elsewhere. Leaders were appointed to each unit and each leader was responsible to his superior for the welfare of the families under his wing, and so on up to the Inca himself. There was no money, no private property, no poverty. The individual suffered no oppression provided he obeyed the laws, which were strict but not unreasonable. He was not allowed to wander about the

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empire at will, but he had a generous allotment of leisure, days on which he could travel to the local fair, and he never lacked for any necessity; every village had its own granary and store-house, supply of tools and clothes and comforts, on which the villagers could draw in time of want, the granaries being kept full by the state. New tribes and peoples coming into the empire, as they often did without the use of force, were incorporated into the system, allowed to keep their own gods which were accepted into the hierarchy of Viracocha, and their own leaders, who were given appointments corresponding with their power and ability. All men worked the land, or their weaving stools or chisels or foundries, and of each man's produce one-third was set aside for the Inca, or the state, one-third for Viracocha, or the church, and one for himself.

There was nothing slapdash about the administration. Every detail of the nation's wealth was recorded by means of the knotted cords of accountancy, the only system of mnemonics used, which were kept by professional accountants. The individual served his time in the army and meritorious service was rewarded by promotion and by a donation of women, for though he might have but one wife he could keep a number of concubines as well. Athletic young men had sometimes to serve their time in the *chasqui* service (the astonishing system of state runners of which there were relays every twelve miles on every road in the empire). By means of the *chasquis* a message could be sent from Quito in the north to Santiago de Chile in the south in less time than it now takes to send the same message

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from door to door by air-mail. On the whole the ordinary man lived a peaceful, unworried life, free from want and rich in leisure.

The life of the Incaic caste was more luxurious but no less industrious. Every man of royal blood held an executive post in the administration, or military rank; there was no mercy on him, should he fail in his duties, whatever his blood. The heir presumptive was trained from childhood to take his father's place, and it was exceedingly hard work; if he was not equal to it, then the dying Inca would nominate some other of his sons. One of the reasons why the empire lasted close on five hundred years was that its leadership was superb; no young man ever took the fringe (the symbol of the Sapa Incaship) unless he had proved himself worthy of it in every respect, and with that object in view he was trained from childhood. But this, which was the strength of the empire, was also its weakness. By a series of fabulous chances Pizarro with his brothers and two hundred-odd adventurers arrived at the one moment when the empire was virtually without a leader; Huayna Capac, the dying Inca, had made the cardinal error of dividing the lands between two of his sons, both of whom he loved: Huascar, his first-born by his wife, and Atahualpa, his son by a concubine. The brothers fell out and civil war followed; Atahualpa was victorious and Huascar was eventually put to death.

Curiously enough, it was the length of the odds against Pizarro that saved him. Very little attention was paid to the handful of bearded strangers riding in from the sea in search of gold. They were objects of passing

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interest, not of fear. In addition to this good luck and to his own audacity, Pizarro had on his side armour, horses and fire-arms, none of which had ever been seen in the Andes.

Pizarro himself was a fascinating character. He was quite illiterate, having been born and bred a swineherd; as age went at that time he was already an old man when he began the Conquest, for he was well into his fifties. The empire, in fact, fell to an ageing ruffian greedy for gold, a man as unaware of pity as of fear, treacherous, ruthless, who cheated enemy and friend alike. Yet he was a great leader. The rough, sardonic figure of Pizarro, whether alive or dead, dominated the new colonies for fifty years and more.

He rode into Cajamarca, north of Cuzco, and offered to parley with the Inca, who accepted out of nothing more than curiosity to see these strange fellows. By an act of brazen trickery Pizarro took the Inca prisoner. Atahualpa, the usurper, himself no fool, offered to fill one of the rooms of his jail with gold and another with silver by way of ransom. Pizarro accepted and the Inca gave instructions that it should be done and it was done; the documents relating to the division of the ransom, estimated at many millions of dollars by present-day values, have been discovered; the two hundred adventurers were suddenly very rich men. Atahualpa having kept his word, Pizarro then garrotted him in public.

The young Inca, Manco, tried for a long time to co-operate with the Spaniards, but eventually gave it up and fled into the mountains; unhappily his wife was

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captured. Pizarro tried to lure him back to Cuzco, it having occurred to him at last that the best way to govern the Indians was through the Inca, but Manco had had his fill; when he killed a couple of Spanish envoys who had been sent to parley with him, Pizarro dismembered Manco's young wife and sent the pieces floating down the river in a basket, where Manco would find them. The battle was on. Manco laid siege simultaneously to Lima and Cuzco and came within an ace of throwing the Spaniards out of the country altogether; but the attempt failed; Manco fell back on guerrilla warfare till civil war broke out among the Spaniards themselves. Almagro, Pizarro's partner, returning empty-handed from an expedition to Chile, found that his comrade had meanwhile appropriated for himself part of the lands awarded to Almagro by the king; out of this quarrel, directly or indirectly, rose the small but sanguinary wars of Salinas, Chupas and Quito, to the immeasurable satisfaction of the Indians. Almagro was defeated and executed, apparently on Pizarro's orders. Pizarro was murdered by the Almagro faction in Lima led by Almagro's half-caste son, a clumsily contrived affair, as recounted by Cieza, which took place one Sunday morning in Pizarro's home; the old man defended himself valiantly, was wounded several times and had to be finished off by a blow on the head with a chamber pot. Manco, the Inca, was later murdered by two of the same faction to whom he had given hospitality and shelter.

It is a grim record, yet in the light of all that followed, the régime of Pizarro was relatively mild. He

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himself, with occasional lapses, was content to leave the Indians alone provided they caused no trouble. Toledo, the viceroy, however, was not.

In the space of a paragraph or two it is impossible to give more than an indication of the nature of Toledo's reign. It systemised the utter destruction of a noble and enlightened civilisation for purposes of royal, official and individual gain, in the name of God. To this end a vast number of *encomiendas* were granted to Spanish soldiers and settlers and such few high-caste Indians as accepted baptism, an *encomienda* being a grant of land with which went a handsome allotment of Indians, the whole to be used at the pleasure and for the personal gain of the recipient, provided always that he surrendered the inevitable Royal Fifth. It would be difficult to cater more generously for the baser human qualities, the more so that *encomiendas* were not granted into perpetuity but only for one lifetime.

Except for a few upper-caste Incas, then, all Indians were slaves without rights. The men were compelled to grow their hair long so that they might more easily be roped, tethered to the rider's saddle and dragged to work. Several hundred thousand Indians are believed to have died at Potosi in the silver mines. Any Spaniard could cut down any number of Indians without being held in any way to account. Negroes, imported by the Spaniards, had their own Indian slaves. The roads were hung with Indian corpses. Cieza records that he saw Indian bodies hanging in the yards of Spanish landlords for the dogs to feed on, and much more, of which he remarks that he cannot bring himself to write. In fair-

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ness it must be said that many protests were made in Spain, where Charles V prepared a set of ordinances designed to alleviate the Indians' lot, but by then it was too late; the system was too deeply embedded; enforcement of the new laws would have led to rebellion against the Crown. Only time could damp that holocaust. Toledo, the new viceroy, an able man himself, sent out by Philip II, legalised most of the abuses, and with his reasonless execution of Tupac Amaru, the last of the Incas, a boy of twenty-one who had spent his childhood in seclusion, Indian resistance ceased. When he, Toledo, went home he was dismissed summarily. 'Go to your home,' Philip told him; 'I sent you to serve kings and you have killed them.' Splendid as this may sound, it was in fact humbug: Philip had wrung every possible *peso* out of his colonial viceroy, and had complained only that it was not enough.

It may render Toledo and his régime a little less remote from the reader more familiar with English history to remind him that on the night of Friday 13th February 1579, while Toledo was asleep in Lima a few miles up the road, a tiny vessel named the *Golden Hind*, whose master was Francis Drake, sailed into Callao harbour under the guns of the fortress and a number of galleons, in search of a certain ship laden with ingots of silver. Unfortunately the ship had already sailed. Drake cut the cables of seven of the other nine merchantmen he found in the harbour, captured another still full of useful merchandise fresh from Spain, and sailed out again. A day or two later he came up with the bullion ship and relieved her of her silver.



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Toledo was very angry indeed. He was awakened at one o'clock in the morning to be told the news, which did not sweeten his temper, and at once dispatched a fleet to capture Drake and bring him back. One of the principal officers of the fleet, as a matter of interest, was Sarmiento, he whom we have already met in the guise of official Spanish historian of the Incas. The fleet, however, failed to catch the *Golden Hind*, which was just as well, since none of the Spanish ships was armed. Drake, having already crossed the Atlantic and passed through the Straits of Magellan, continued to follow the coast of the Americas in a northerly direction as far as the 48th parallel, turned south-west, crossed the Pacific to Java, the Indian Ocean to Africa, rounded the Cape of Good Hope, and so home to Plymouth.

Toledo went home to Spain a year later. It might be said of him that he served his king well, but humanity not at all.

### 3

ON the hills above Cuzco lies the fortress of Sacsahuamana. The northern walls are megalithic and were erected long before the Incas; their date is unknown. The southern walls were built by the Inca Tupac Yupanqui, grandfather of Atahualpa, who welded the whole into one gigantic fortress, later the scene of several battles between Incas and Spaniards, and between bickering Spanish factions.

I walked up the hill with the guide, whose name was Manco, along the great north road of the Incas, and then over the short green turf.

'We say hello to the shepherd,' Manco said, and we crossed the shoulder of a hill and found a shepherd boy watching a small flock of sheep grazing on the slopes below. Manco and the boy began their formal greeting.

'*Amasua*,' said the shepherd, which means: 'Do not steal.'

'*Amakrella*,' Manco enjoined him, or: 'Do not idle.'

'*Amalulla*,' the shepherd responded blithely: 'Do not lie.'

Understand that the three most heinous misdemeanours in Incaic society were theft, idleness and lying.

'*Ccanchispishinallatac*,' Manco concluded gravely. 'And the same to you.'

The boy shifted the bright woollen cap on his head, changed the cud of coca from his left cheek to the right,

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and grinned. Somebody, Manco remarked, was about to lose a few sweet potatoes; seventy or eighty yards down the hill a sheep had strayed into the crops.

I expected the boy to run after it and chase it out into the open country. Not at all; he took the sling from his shoulder, set a pebble in the pocket, swung it three or four times about his head and let fly. The stone travelled faster than the eye could follow it, humming like a ricochet, and struck the earth a few inches from the sheep's nose. It trotted back to the flock.

'Do that again,' I asked. 'Aim for something.'

Manco pointed out a rock about the size of a man's head lying by itself a hundred yards away and said something in Quechua. The boy loaded the sling and swung it hard; the stone hit the rock and bounced far into the sky. He handed me the sling with a grin. It consisted of nothing more than a cord of llama wool and a split pocket to hold the missile. We practised slinging stones for twenty minutes, without signal success on my part.

The sling was one of the principal weapons of the Incas. The others were the javelin and the bow and arrow, constituting the short-range artillery, and the mace and club for in-fighting. They fought without armour.

It is not really to be wondered at that small numbers of Spaniards were able to rout large numbers of Indians who, however courageous, could never get close enough for their weapons to have effect. The Spaniards were highly trained; they wore a heavy armour, carried lances and swords and were usually mounted; the footmen were armed with arquebuses firing a species of

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heavy buckshot, sometimes a single missile, sometimes two bullets joined with a length of chain. The effect of such weapons on naked men was devastating. Spanish diarists frequently write of skirmishes in which hundreds of Indians were slaughtered and one Spanish soldier suffered a minor wound, to the outraged irritation of the Spaniards. If a horse sustained a wound then their vexation knew no bounds; they had no horses, of course, but those they brought with them by sea, or bred after arrival; when a mare dropped a foal in the course of a march, Indian slaves were employed to carry it along in a litter till the animal was strong enough to use its own legs.

Beneath the older, northern walls of Sacsahuamana there is a flat and grassy plain about half a mile in length by three hundred yards wide. It is overlooked on the other flank, opposite the walls, by a low rocky ridge. Here on this ridge, carved in the rock, are the throne and the seats on which the Inca and his court sat as spectators of the *huarachicu*, the annual trials through which the young men of high caste, the future leaders not excluding the heir presumptive, were put to mark their passage from puberty to manhood. Long cross-country races were run, battles were fought; there was wrestling, slinging, javelin-throwing; the youngsters were submitted to every conceivable test of endurance and intelligence; it was a very stark business. Those who survived — and the ordeal lasted something over a week, during which the participants were given no food — were led before the Inca, who himself pierced the lobes of the boys' ears to mark their graduation. In the course

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of time the lobes thus pierced were stretched till they would hold jewels signifying rank and caste; it was this custom that gave rise to the Spanish term *orejones*, literally 'big-ears,' by which they were able to distinguish high-caste Incas and those of royal blood from the rest.

It was fine that day. A stiff wind was blowing, the clouds were big and high and white above the mountains. We came up to the crest of the ridge among the chiselled rocks and on the throne itself a small Indian boy sat, playing a flute. Beyond him on the other side of the plain were the stupendous grey walls of the fortress.

'His mother send him,' Manco said with a shrug. 'People give the boy money sometimes.' I gave the boy a few coins. It didn't matter: it was still a good picture to come upon.

We clambered down the face of the ridge and walked across the plain toward the walls. Nobody knows exactly how these huge blocks of granite, some of them weighing a hundred tons and more, were quarried, dragged perhaps for miles, worked and smoothed till each sat exactly in its allotted place one on top of the other: it could only be by man-power. Above the outer walls the Inca additions were clearly identifiable by their finer workmanship, use of smaller blocks of stone, and perfectly rounded edges. Nearly all Incaic architecture can be associated with one or other of the Sapa Incas, for the stone-work grew progressively finer as the empire and its culture advanced. Since the walls of many Incaic buildings remain intact it is slightly absurd to speak of them as ruins. Only the roofs have vanished, for despite the colossal proportions of the walls them-

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selves, the roofs were of thatch, very beautiful and intricate, according to Spanish travellers; the Incas could certainly have devised a stone roof had they thought it useful; probably they allowed for earthquakes.

We made our way down the hill to the south side and came to the terrace of Colcampata and the pleasant meadow called the Field of the Sun, which only the Inca himself, with his close relatives, could cultivate, and indeed was compelled by law to do so, having to pay his tributes, or taxes, no less than the rest of his subjects. For their justice and beneficence the laws relating to labour and the payment of taxes evolved by the Incas would grace better civilisations than theirs.

Manco took me to his sister's bakery in Cuzco, where we ate hot cakes of maize and drank maize beer.

On the foundations of the Temple of the Sun, called Coricancha, the monastery of Santo Domingo stands. It was erected by the Spaniards of Incaic stone pillaged from Coricancha and other buildings as they were pulled down. The massive curved wall of the original temple, whose total circumference appears to have been something like four hundred metres, seems to carry the monastery on its back as an elephant carries a shooting-box, accepting the burden with indifference. So little remains of the original, however, that there is nothing to reconstruct it with in the mind's eye, and the only reliable information about the nature and contents of the inner sanctuary, which was some three hundred feet long, is to be found in the sketch by Santa Cruz, an Indian historian, which came to light not many years ago. A

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copy of the sketch is printed in *Ancient Civilisations of the Andes* by Philip Means, who, following W. H. Prescott and Sir Clements Markham, is now the leading authority on the subject. Santa Cruz may have done his crude little sketch on the spot, or perhaps from memory; most likely the latter, for when the Spaniards found the temple its interior walls were sheeted with pure gold, the roof was lined with gold, the great images were of gold and silver. They stripped it all and melted it down; its value in money must have been enormous.

The image of Ynti, the sun, stood on the left of the eastern end of the sanctuary, Mama Quilla, the moon, on the right; in the centre was the huge, egg-shaped symbol of Viracocha, the Creator-god. On either side, in two rows, the mummified remains of the Incas sat. It must have been a very strange and impressive place.

So far in these notes, for what they are worth, Ynti and Viracocha have been used as names synonymously. In fact, they were two distinct and separate deities, and their gradual emergence as such among the Incas shows how the religion evolved by this enlightened people out of their own hearts came in its later stages to have curious similarities to Christianity. It was clear enough to anybody who dared to raise his eyes to the sky that the sun could not be the master of the universe; he followed an ordained course without deviation, was subject to eclipse and to the seasons; the sun, in fact, was no more than the manifestation of some superior entity, who ordered all, created all, even Ynti. Thus Viracocha came into existence as the intellectual and spiritual god of the Incaic caste, while Ynti remained

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the god of the ordinary people, about whose person fetishism and ritual continued to flourish.

One of the most intriguing aspects of the service of Ynti was the use of the Chosen Women, as they were called. Young girls of great beauty were placed in something akin to a nunnery and kept there; they were trained to serve as handmaidens in the various ceremonies and rites; they also wove the mantles and tapestries and cloaks worn by the high priests, the Inca and his Coya. The cult of the Chosen Women, however, appears to have lost some of its holiness in the latter years of the empire; the Inca used them as a stock of acceptable gifts to his friends and military leaders, and on occasion as a private harem. Terrible punishments, never less than death, were inflicted on any who dared to interfere with the Chosen Women. Father Cobo, another Spanish diarist, relates that when from time to time the Inca stole into the House of the Virgins at night to avail himself of one of Ynti's young wives, he would be reminded of it on the following morning during his devotions by the porter, who, being responsible, was obliged in self-defence to inform the Inca that he had been observed.

'Very true,' the Inca replied. 'I sinned.'

I was hauled from bed at four o'clock in the morning and reminded that I was travelling that day to Machu Picchu, the Lost City of the Incas, a label which, like others of its kind, fills me with a deep and lasting nausea mainly for its own sake but also because, with or without pedantry, it is inaccurate. Machu Picchu was not



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lost, since the Indians living in the valley in 1911 knew of it and led Hiram Bingham to it; it was plainly not a city, it was little more than a fortified village, one of a chain of similar minor citadels lying in the valley of the Urubamba river; and there is considerable doubt about its Incaic origins. As the only skeletal remains found in the cemetery were those of women, and as the Incas rarely wasted refinement of architecture on their barracks, it may also be denied that it was a fortress. Probably it was a small trading town with a normal garrison of soldiers, and later a refuge of the Chosen Women, whom, for the same personal reasons and because that label, too, is apocryphal, I flatly refuse to call Virgins of the Sun.

My companion at breakfast and throughout the day was a North American brain surgeon who, while attending a convention of some kind in Lima, had fled for a day or two in order to see what he could of Peru, but there were no more than seven in the party all told, and the young Peruvian student who was our guide. We set off across the silent town while it was still dark and reached the station as dawn broke. It was cold and the air was scented with burning eucalyptus. Machu Picchu had been a place I had wanted to travel to for many years and I climbed into the *autocarril* with a sense of excitement.

We set off. The *autocarril*, which was simply a small motor coach that moved on rails, was comfortable enough; we trundled back and forth across the hillside climbing all the while, with a deal of laborious point-switching on the driver's part at the end of every ascent,

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till Cuzco lay beneath us in the blue haze of the smoke of its own chimneys as it stirred and awoke and lit its fires against the chill of dawn. We rolled over the ridge and rattled down the cutting into the Anta valley, or Xaquixahuana as it was known to the Incas, and the sun rose above the peaks of Vilcabamba, which were sheer and white.

The Anta valley is wide and quite flat, like a lake among the mountains; the crude little railway runs along its centre among the Indian farms. It was a much favoured battlefield, this valley, for here the early Incas met and routed the Antis, here Atahualpa trounced his half-brother Huascar, here Manco mounted his great revolt and Gonzalo, last of the Pizarro brothers, claiming the governorship of Peru, was met and defeated by the king's army and Vaca de Castro. It is a peaceful land now, fertile and bright with crops. We ambled along the rails, halting once where a party of Indian labourers was working on the track, and reached the limits of the valley. Under the walls of the Cordillera we turned and climbed to the head of a pass and then ran down fast into the rocky gorge of the Urubamba. The cliffs were nearly sheer in places, densely wooded where they sloped more gently to the rushing brown torrent; on the shoulders and ledges of the peaks there were Incaic walls and terracing, each one a part, a link, in the chain of *pucar*as, or small fortresses, built for the defence of this, the eastern approach to the empire. It was warm here, and the undergrowth was almost tropical, brushing the windows of the car as we followed the river's course. This was a river of character, with a long angry

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past, broken now and then by fierce rapids and tossing spray. It was odd to remember that this water, circling the heights of Machu Picchu, debouching from the Andes into the Amazon, would flow into the Atlantic one day.

We stopped for twenty minutes at Ollantaytambo, where there are the remains of a great fortress. An Indian woman had dressed up her child, ready to be photographed, at a price.

I was warned that Machu Picchu had been spoiled by tourism. This is not quite true. Certainly it has been made more accessible; you now go up the mountainside in a swaying, ramshackle coach instead of on a mule; of the two I would say the coach is the more perilous, though that is by the way. But it has not been spoiled in the sense that, for instance, the ruins of Pompeii have been spoiled — by its owners rather than by its tourists, the owners having arranged that you shall enter through a turnstile to be plagued by a uniformed official who makes great play of showing the ladies the drawings in the brothel, which are very poor, and whose repertoire of jokes is limited to a leer on the subject of phallic symbols.

There is no dinginess at Machu Picchu, nor is there likely to be, since it is too far from anywhere for any but genuinely interested people to travel to. There is the coach, there is a little hostel on the summit in which you can get a bite to eat, but that is all; for the rest Machu Picchu remains much as it was found in 1911, and is one of the most awesome places in the world.

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The town's name is unknown. It sits astride a narrow ridge connecting two peaks, one called Machu Picchu and the other, which is smaller, Huayna Picchu, on whose summit there is a watch-tower and a few precipitous terraces. The canyon which surrounds the two peaks is nearly a mile deep, and mostly sheer. Grinding up the mountainside you are never out of sight of the river in the depths of the gorge; at the end it is no more than a thread of silver. If you are affected by heights this is the place in which you will feel it. The clouds had closed in when we reached the ridge and the ranks of the neighbouring peaks were wrapped in mist; they are densely wooded almost to the top, so that, even after the cloud had moved away, the trees still smoked; but perhaps this was the best time to be here, for one had a sense of remoteness and silence and detachment. Nothing stirred.

The Peruvian student delivered himself of his lecture and then we were free to go as we wanted. In a strange town, even uninhabited as this one was, one's instinct is always to find its heart and then the arteries, in that order. I remember a character in an early book of Dos Passos who, on his arrival in an unfamiliar city, asked an idler: 'Which is the way to the centre o' things?' Not the main street, not the town hall, not the principal saloon, but a nameless place, a street corner which somehow had come to be the city's heart, where things began and ended. There is no such place in Machu Picchu because the centre of things is a human, not an architectural terminal. Empty towns are always unsatisfying in this sense: not to find the heart is always to be lost.

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So we drifted about the walks and terraces and stone houses and gravitated towards the temple which stands on the hump of the ridge, where there is an altar called the Hitching Post of the Sun, which is a wonderfully rich and evocative name. To lay the palm of one's hand against the lintel of a door, to run the tips of one's fingers over the face of the masonry as a blind man does, feeling for knowledge, might have helped; (I wonder if it was D. H. Lawrence who gave appreciation by the senses the slightly unsavoury connotation it has today: it seems to be regarded with disapproval as indicative of something to do with the blood, as indeed it has, but also sexual and almost certainly lustful). But it did not point the way to the centre of things.

The extent of the terraces at Machu Picchu and the number of the dwellings show that the population could not have numbered more than eight or nine hundred, if as many, but it was probably a pleasant little community to be one of. The architecture is refined and dignified but practical. In every dwelling there would be a fire; the women would weave and cook, the men would hoe the terraces and tend the sweet potatoes and maize; on the grassy banks above the town there would be a communal herd of llamas, for wool and meat. In the quarry the young stone-mason who had recently completed a course at the college of architects in Cuzco would show the elders the new way of splitting granite blocks along their natural seams — insert a peg of wood, soak it with water, leave it overnight to swell — and how to shape and smooth them one against the other, ready for the building of the new two-storeyed house by the irriga-

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tion ditch. At sun-up and sun-down the priest would call his flock to prayer in the temple on the hill and the howling of a *gua-gua* (a child) would punctuate the droning of his voice, while in the watch-towers of Machu and Huayna the guards would be changed with flute music and drumming. The whole town would be thrown out of gear by the arrival of a *chasqui* from Ollantaytambo with news to the effect that the new Inca would be honouring Machu Picchu with a visit shortly, in the course of one of those troublesome tours of the empire they were always making. As night fell Mama Quilla, the moon, lifted her head from the forests of the Amazon and, rising above the misty peaks, shone down on Machu Picchu where people slept without fear, anxiety, or want.



PART FOUR  
HUMBOLDT



## I

FOR no better reason than that I had not travelled any considerable distance in South America by rail, I bought a ticket to Arequipa in the train which runs twice a week from Cuzco. It cannot be far, perhaps six hundred miles, but it took a very long time.

It was a clear, glistening morning and the platform was crowded. The train stood there, but the doors were locked. Indians swathed in faded ponchos walked up and down morosely; dozens of *cholas* squatted like hens on their bundles and waited with their usual patience for something to happen. A few Peruvian business men, whose North American suits and felt hats lent them the air of gangsters or private detectives, read newspapers and kept an eye cocked on the doors of the train, disdainful of the hideous scramble for seats which would follow the unlocking, yet aware that they must join it willy-nilly, or stand. The riff-raff that gravitates to any small-town station when the week's first train leaves sold lengths of maize bread, magazines and fruit to anybody who would buy.

The doors were unlocked. Happily I had engaged a porter, a well-developed *cholo* whose breakfast of coca had somewhat stupefied him; he was oblivious to pain, whether his own or another's. I watched him through the window. Using my suitcase as a cow-catcher he lowered his head at the entrance to the long carriage,

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drew a deep breath, and charged; it worked admirably; there were screams, cries of protest, a great deal of cursing; they fell like ninepins. My suitcase, bloodied but intact, was firmly lodged in a seat. The blood-letting was quite unnecessary, of course; when the porters had gone the carriage was less than half full and here were seats to spare.

At the northern extremity of the Urubamba valley Machu Picchu stands; at its southern limit there is a series of heights known as the Knot of Vilcañota. The railroad swung into the valley and turned south. It was fine country; the turf was green and dewy, the crops radiant; the river glittered in the sun and the grey walls of the Cordillera were alive with waterfalls. Every few miles along the valley the train stopped to take on a party of Indian girls who presently came through the carriage with baskets of peaches to sell, and strips of dried llama meat and bread and wine; at the next stop they would get off and a new lot would embark, so that the train was like a market-place for hours. At one of the longer halts I climbed down on to the track and walked along towards the rear of the train. The conditions in which the Indians travelled were frightful, but they sat high on their bundles and seemed delighted by it all. A young Peruvian at my side was angered and embarrassed that I should see it, however. 'The government promised to put all this right,' he said bitterly. 'It's a disgrace.' I told him that Peru was not alone in the matter of bad railways, but he was not to be satisfied. A couple of *cholitas* with wide, saucer-shaped hats and brown faces watched us from their perch in one of

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the open trucks and presently called something in Quechua; the young Peruvian, who was excessively solemn, told them to hold their vulgar tongues and they shrieked with laughter and slapped their broad thighs.

The first few hours of the journey were fascinating. The arrival of the train at the stations was evidently a social event of some importance and was attended by the whole village. It would be hard, of course, to ignore its arrival, since the village green is in effect the platform; three sides of the green are occupied by dwellings; the fourth is given over to the railway and the turf comes right to the train's wheels. The Indians had a clean, well-fed look in this valley, but as we began the long climb to the pass of Vilcañota the country changed.

It was late afternoon, then. Half-way up the pass the engine ran out of steam and we stopped for nearly an hour. The bleak shoulders of the ridges were hunched above us and it was cold and flecks of snow moved down the train's windows with the wind. A party of four Peruvians further down the carriage had got themselves a little drunk and were arguing vehemently about *futbol* and politics. The engine took up its load again and we rumbled on to the head of the pass, where there were three gloomy adobe huts beside the track. A herd of llamas and vicuña cropped the thin turf near the water-tower and an Indian woman stood beside them, spinning absently, twisting the bright spindle with a flick of her fingers; the man with her walked up and down, knitting swiftly. There was nobody else. Mist clung to the snow on the naked slopes and the wind moaned along the train.

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So we trundled down to Ayaviri, which lies at the northern end of Lake Titicaca. The hours dragged away. Somewhere about nine o'clock that night we drew into Juliaca. I was glad to leave the train by then.

I travelled the rest of the way to Arequipa in a sleeping berth, but it was a bad night. The railroad is one of the highest in the world, reaching an altitude over 16,000 feet; you can breathe at that height quite easily in an upright position, but to do so lying down is another matter. The slightest pressure on the chest, even so little as is exerted in lying on one's side, is enough to make breathing difficult. I woke up every ten minutes throughout the night with a sense of suffocation and panic and arrived in Arequipa hot-eyed at half-past seven on a Sunday morning, which is an uncommendable time to arrive anywhere, and least of all in a sleepy provincial town.

However, as I went up the steps of the hotel a muddied shooting-brake drew up behind me and an elderly man got out and stretched luxuriantly. The brake was loaded with fishing tackle and camping equipment. He nodded and smiled and I asked him casually if he had had good fishing.

'Boy,' he said. 'I tell you,' he went on earnestly, 'there's bigger and better rainbow trout in that river than there is in all Canada.' He stopped. 'How would you like a rainbow trout for breakfast?'

'I'd love it.'

'Fine. We'll get the cook to fix a couple.'

I had a bath and a shave and met him in the empty dining-room; the trout were as good as he said they were.

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I did not stay very long in Arequipa, which might be described, and usually is, as a pretty town. I hankered after remoter, less urban, less civilised places. Most of Arequipa's buildings are of sillar, an ivory-coloured volcanic stone quarried on the slopes of El Misti, the defunct volcano which dominates the valley the town lies in. El Misti is perfectly conical in shape, like a small Fujiyama, and is suitably streaked with snow below the crater. Arequipa has, moreover, a race-course, a number of golf courses, several swimming pools and a thermal bath called Jesus. The municipal brass band plays in the square on Sunday mornings, and the bustle of the shady streets is lent the proper touch of colour by the infusion of one or two well-shampooed llamas which trot up and down among the trams in a manner which suggests a use of the word 'quaint,' short of any other.

I was anxious to reach the Pacific coast and in particular the Atacama Desert, which I thought might be more rewarding. It was, albeit not in the way I had expected. My passage across the Atacama, of which you have seen all when you have seen a very little, was much enlivened by my companions, an ex-police inspector and his son, who lost a pair of Mexican candlesticks.

The southernmost town in Peru is called Tacna and it stands on the fringes of the desert a few miles from the Chilean frontier. We came in under a grey counterpane of cloud and rolled bumping across the stony earth toward the solitary hut. When the dust subsided there was nothing to be seen but the naked grey-brown ridges running from the foothills to the sea. A

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great fuss was made about passports, which were collected from the half-dozen travellers who disembarked, and about the ride into the town. I found myself in a dusty shooting-brake with an old man of fierce, bony aspect who must have been at least seventy, and a young one who appeared to be his son. I saw a good deal of them during the next day or two.

We started off. 'Dog-gone,' the old fellow rasped, 'I don't like to let my passport out of my sight. I tell you, son, a man's no good in a foreign country without his passport.'

'It'll be all right, daddy. You'll see.'

The son I took to be about forty. He was a large, plump, loose man, clearly torn between his own natural lethargy, love for his father and impatience. They would have attracted attention anywhere, those two, not excluding their own country. In Tacna they were fabulous. With his bowed legs, swinging gait and trenchant manner of speech, the old man was so much a caricature of his type that he seemed slightly unreal; I had never really believed in the vocabulary traditional to pioneers, but here it was, rich and strong. By contrast his son had something of the yokel about him; he followed his father hither and thither grappling hopelessly with the old man's cantankerous suspicions of everything and everybody he encountered, and durn foreigners in particular. For all his impatience, however, it was evident that he was very proud of the old fellow. 'It'll be all right. Don't you worry.'

'How do you know that, hey? I tell you, this is the first time in my life I ever let my passport out of

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my sight. Dog-gone, we'll be lucky if we ever see them again.'

'But they took everybody else's, too, daddy.' He turned to me. 'Didn't they?'

'They did.'

'There you are, daddy.'

'Just the same, I don't like it. How are we goin' to git out of here without our passports?'

'I tell you, it'll be all right,' his son wailed. 'The man said they've got to be stamped and he'd give them back to us in Tacna.'

'Where? Where?'

'In Tacna.'

'Where's that, for Pete's sake?'

'Here, daddy.'

'Here? Oh, yeh. Yeh, that's right. Forgot. Tacna.' He narrowed his gimlet eyes out of the window. 'Well, it don't look much of a place to me.'

His son drew a deep breath.

The old man said: 'Where did you say our bags were?'

'In the other automobile.'

'You mean to say they got our bags? They got our bags back there?'

'They'll be all right, daddy, you'll see.'

'Why, jumpin' jiminy, how could you let 'em do a thing like that, son? A man's no good in a foreign country without his belongings, you know that.'

'They're in the other automobile.'

The old man twisted about and looked out of the car's rear window. 'Ain't no other automobile there.'

'It'll be along.'

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'Think so, do you? Who says they won't just stop off and clean 'em up, hey?'

'Now why would they do that?'

'You know what's in them bags, son. How about them candlesticks?'

'They're of no value, daddy,' his son said hopelessly.

'Gol darn it, we've toted them candlesticks a long ways, son, and we don't want to lose 'em now.'

'We won't lose them.'

I tried to lead the conversation in another direction. 'What kind of candlesticks are they?'

'Just candlesticks,' the son said. 'Silver. Not of much value. We just thought they'd look nice on the shelf back home.'

'All the way from Mexico,' the old man said. 'The trouble we've had with them candlesticks just don't bear thinkin' about. Every darn frontier and customs office from Mexico to here. Now we've got 'em this far, some thievin' son of a customs official goes and puts 'em on another automobile.'

'For God's sake, daddy.'

'Well, they're your candlesticks, son.'

'They'll turn up.'

We rattled on across the desert into the town.

It was a sad, quiet little place with an air of having given up an unequal struggle long ago — a struggle against the grey desert, against the Humboldt current which made the desert, against the endless desiccation. We lunched in the town's one hotel, an overblown, echoing place with an empty swimming pool in the back yard, and collected our passports. At two o'clock



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the brake arrived for the fifty-mile journey across the desert and the Chilean frontier to Arica. I rejoiced to find myself with my two companions again.

The Atacama is about fifteen hundred miles long by some seventy or eighty miles wide; it runs between the Pacific coast and the Cordillera de la Costa, and it is dry all the way. Rivers begin among the snows of the Andes and they flow down through the foothills into the desert, but there they dry up and disappear; none of them reaches the sea. It has never been known to rain in this country, summer or winter: the Humboldt, flowing up from the South Pacific, brings no rain, and effectively prevents it.

So the desolate lands support no life whatever. There are no oases; no sage or cactus grows; for a thousand miles the earth is as barren as the moon. In summer it is an impassable furnace, a hearth for the sun itself to burn on; for most of the year a roof of flat grey cloud hangs motionless overhead, as uneventful as the plains beneath, and the air smells faintly of ashes. In winter the sea mists roll in and lie across the earth sometimes for weeks on end. Many lonely prospectors, searching for metal ores or oil or nitrates, have died of thirst within a stone's-throw of their own camps, where they have been ambushed by the sea mists; their bones may lie undiscovered for months or even years, for not many people travel across the desert at any time. It is, in the old man's words, a hell of a place.

The track, scarcely distinguishable from the rest of the plain, flowed away into the distant haze. Once or twice we saw ruined huts, and once there was a lifeless

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village on the horizon; there are quite a few of these which at one time were busy and populous places living on the wealth that lay about them; before the first world war Chile supplied 90 per cent of the world's demand for nitrates; now it is 9 per cent.

We drove on for an hour or more. My companions frowned out of the windows. The old man appeared to be asleep. His son, who was showing increasing signs of nervousness as we approached the frontier, said quietly: 'Do you suppose they're liable to be tough at the customs here?'

I said I didn't know. 'They're usually quite reasonable, in my experience.' We were both anxious not to wake up the old man. 'Have you packed them on top or underneath?'

'They're right on top,' he said miserably.

'I should slip them under a shirt or something. If they find them, then you simply pay up. If they don't, then everybody is happy.'

'Daddy says it's not ethical.'

'No, but it saves a lot of trouble.'

'It's too late now, anyway.'

'We can stop very easily.'

The old man said loudly: 'No matter where you pack 'em, you can bet your life they'll find 'em. They never failed yet.'

The track swung away towards the sea. We lurched down into a shallow gully and along it and climbed, and then in the distance there was a low white building and a flag-pole. We drove into the compound and drew up by the building. The driver unloaded the suitcases and

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stacked them on the stone bench where there was a little knot of uniformed officials. They nodded and said: 'Open, please, *señores*.'

For the next few minutes I was fully occupied with the business of showing my baggage and passport and filling in forms. Presently I turned to see how my companions had fared. They said nothing. The driver hoisted the suitcases on to the roof of the car, the white pole across the track was raised, and we drove on.

'Well,' the old man said crisply, 'they got 'em.'

'Got them? The candlesticks?'

'Yep.'

'But how do you mean, got them?'

'They took them.'

'Just took them?'

'Just took 'em.'

His son said: 'They said they had to send them down to Santiago.'

'What for?'

'First they go to Arica, then to Santiago. We collect in Santiago. Maybe they have to value them before we can pay duty or something.'

'They got 'em,' the old man said.

'We'll get them back, daddy, you'll see.'

'Did you get a receipt?' I asked. I wished at once I had not put the question, for they both looked at me thunderstruck; any confidence they had had in the eventual return of the candlesticks vanished.

'Dog-gone, son, you didn't get yourself a receipt?'

His son wilted. 'No,' he said haggardly. 'I never thought about a receipt. Oh, God.'

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I tried, too late, to make amends. 'I don't suppose it matters.'

'They're gone,' the old man said. 'Think you'll ever see those candlesticks sittin' up there on the shelf back home? Why, the dirty, crooked . . .' His bony profile jutted across the grey window. 'Son,' he said at last, 'you got to be a sight smarter than this. A man's no use if he's goin' to let every durn, no-good son of a customs official gyp him out of a pair o' Mexican candlesticks.' He shook his head. 'All the way from Mexico. . . . Well, we'll have to git to work, that's all. I'll git those candlesticks back if it's the last thing I do for you, son.'

I suggested that we might be able to intercept them in Arica, since the candlesticks had to pass through that town on their way to Santiago. At least we should be able to obtain a receipt. There was no plane south tonight.

'That's right,' the old man said. 'By golly, that's right. Son, we got to git busy, soon as we reach town.'

An hour later we passed the ugly sprawl of a sulphur refinery and drew into the little town of Arica. It squats on the edge of the Pacific about a small inlet. There is also a jetty. Here are the customs houses and warehouses of Bolivia as well as of Chile, for the La Paz-Arica Railways end here, providing Bolivia with access to the sea. The jetty appears to act as a kind of hook for collecting the refuse of the Humboldt current as it sweeps up the coast, and the inlet is dense with flotsam whose ripe smell hangs about the streets day and night.

We were taken to the police station to register our

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arrival in Chile, a country which I may say in passing is very much easier to enter than to leave, and then to the hotel, a dark mausoleum under the shadow of the Morro headland.

A little while later I found my companions in conversation with the manager of the hotel, a German who spoke a little English. At seven o'clock, the manager seemed to think, the officials would return from the frontier with the day's confiscations, which would be deposited in the customs warehouse pending their dispatch to Santiago. Then was the time. We had an hour to wait and for a few minutes the candlesticks were forgotten; the old man told me some grim stories of police work in the United States during the early years of this century.

Reminiscence sweetened him. Tears sprang to his wizened eyes as he recalled the details of some appalling murder and the subsequent pursuit of the malefactor, who public-spiritedly resisted arrest, was shot, and so saved a great deal of everybody's time and trouble.

His son glowed with pride. 'If there was any shooting to be done,' he told me fondly, 'it was always daddy they sent, wasn't it, daddy?'

'Aw, I just happened to be handy with a gun,' the old man said.

'Don't you believe him. Daddy was the best shot in the force.'

'Did you always carry a gun?' I asked.

'Most always. There was one time I didn't. Forgot it. There was a couple of fellers broke into a block of offices and a night watchman heard 'em and I went along

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and realised when I got there I'd come without a gun. I could hear these two fellers over the partition, workin' on the safe, so I hollered out to 'em, "Come on out of there or I'll kill you. Throw out those guns. Come on, look sharp, I'm counting three, if them guns aren't over here I'll let you have it. One, two . . ." I could hear 'em whisperin'. Guess they must have recognised my voice——'

'They all knew him.'

'Then over comes the guns, the both of 'em.'

'Daddy, you haven't told how you lammed them.'

'Aw, one of 'em saw through the trick I'd pulled and started callin' names, so I just lammed him.'

His son nodded. 'Pretty handy with his fists, too.'

In the evening we walked about the dim little town looking for the customs officials, but we never found them, nor obtained any receipt for the candlesticks. I suggested a visit to the American consul in Santiago, who would doubtless know the ins and outs of such matters, and this cheered them up a little; the Chilean authorities were not likely to take a pair of Mexican candlesticks, or indeed anything else, for no good reason. 'Reason or no reason,' the old man said, 'we aim to git 'em back.'

I hope they did.

The next morning, in inky darkness, we set off again.

WHERE the journey ended I do not know. I knew I was no longer going anywhere: I was only travelling farther and farther from the places I had been to, but where the one came to an end and the other began I cannot say — somewhere between Arequipa and Santiago. I have chosen Arica as the place at which to finish this account as arbitrarily as I elected to begin it at Presidente Prudente: because it feels right. Looking back on the rest of that long journey down the Andean coast I remember being aware at the time that the landscape, the cities and the people were growing more familiar the farther south I went, much as they do in the other hemisphere when you travel north. You could put Santiago where Milan is and Valparaiso where Newcastle stands and neither would be very much out of place; in aspect and feeling both are more European than they are South American, and they were not what I had travelled a great distance to look for. I had found what I had been seeking already; the rest was perforce post-scriptive, if there is such a word; if there is not, then I submit it as better than some.

The voyage up the coast to Panama was uneventful. At Valparaiso two deck-hands, both rather drunk, fell off the quayside into the harbour and had to be hauled out again; a thousand handkerchiefs fluttered, the scuppers ran with tears. And then we settled down to a

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succession of days all exactly alike whose monotony was broken by the occasional shore trip only; for the rest of the time we were like goldfish in a tank: no others could see in, certainly, but inside all was visible, and the ship, which had seemed so very big at first, grew smaller and smaller. The ship was not a good one in any case and the ill temper of the crew communicated itself to the passengers, and there were continual outbreaks of bad feeling to which only the lovers were oblivious. For my own part I was content enough to lean against the rail and watch the fish flying on the wind, and occasionally do some work. It vexed me a little that what I had seen of Chile had left so prosaic an impression: in Brazil and Bolivia and Peru there had been much that was new and stimulating; in Chile, nothing, though I knew it to be a beautiful and interesting country. I had not started my journey with the intention of writing about it unless I found something which seemed to me worth saying; perhaps the fault was mine that Chile had offered it and I had not seen it.

However, at a place called Mejillones an unexpected thing happened. Mejillones is a small, forgotten mining town a few miles north of Antofagasta; behind it and all about the desert lies. The ship called there for an hour or two, to take aboard freight, and I took the opportunity of going ashore.

It was very hot that day. The lighter put in alongside a crumbling timber jetty. I walked up the beach and across the single-track railway that ran along the coast. There was little else. Huddled about the railway there were a few shabby concrete buildings like the pill-



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boxes of a forgotten war; there was the burning grey sand and the rails, and the sun. Two children followed me up to the main street; these two, and the three women sitting in the sand, were the only living things I saw, yet it must have been a town built to house ten thousand people. The street was an area of dust so hot underfoot that presently I was glad to pad along in the shade. But the buildings trailed away into the desert and presently I turned back. The biggest building in the place was of timber, warped and split by the heat; above the doors one could just make out the painted name: *Victoria Theatre*. There was no way in; the door was barred and screwed down. The three women sitting on their haunches on the other side of the road watched me. That was all. In Mejillones there were no events; not even the big ship lying out in the bay was an event. It was a place where time did not pass; it would always be this same hot, motionless afternoon.

I went back to the ship. Climbing the gangway to the deck I noticed that the lighter which had come out from the shore with a few tons of cargo was still there under the stern. I leaned against the rail and for a little while watched the sacks swung aboard by the derrick and lowered into the hold. There was a name printed on the sacks and presently there was one a little less blurred than the rest: the name was *Fabulosa Consolidated*.

And suddenly the heaviness of heart that had been troubling me all the way from Arica to Valparaiso and would weigh more and more heavily as the colour of the sea changed from blue to green and from green to

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grey — suddenly it lifted. I could have shouted with the joy of it. Presidente Prudente and Campo Grande, Ruana and Fabulosa and La Paz, Titicaca and Machu Picchu — *they* were the reality, this the dream. We sailed home with the cargo of tin in the hold.

THE END.